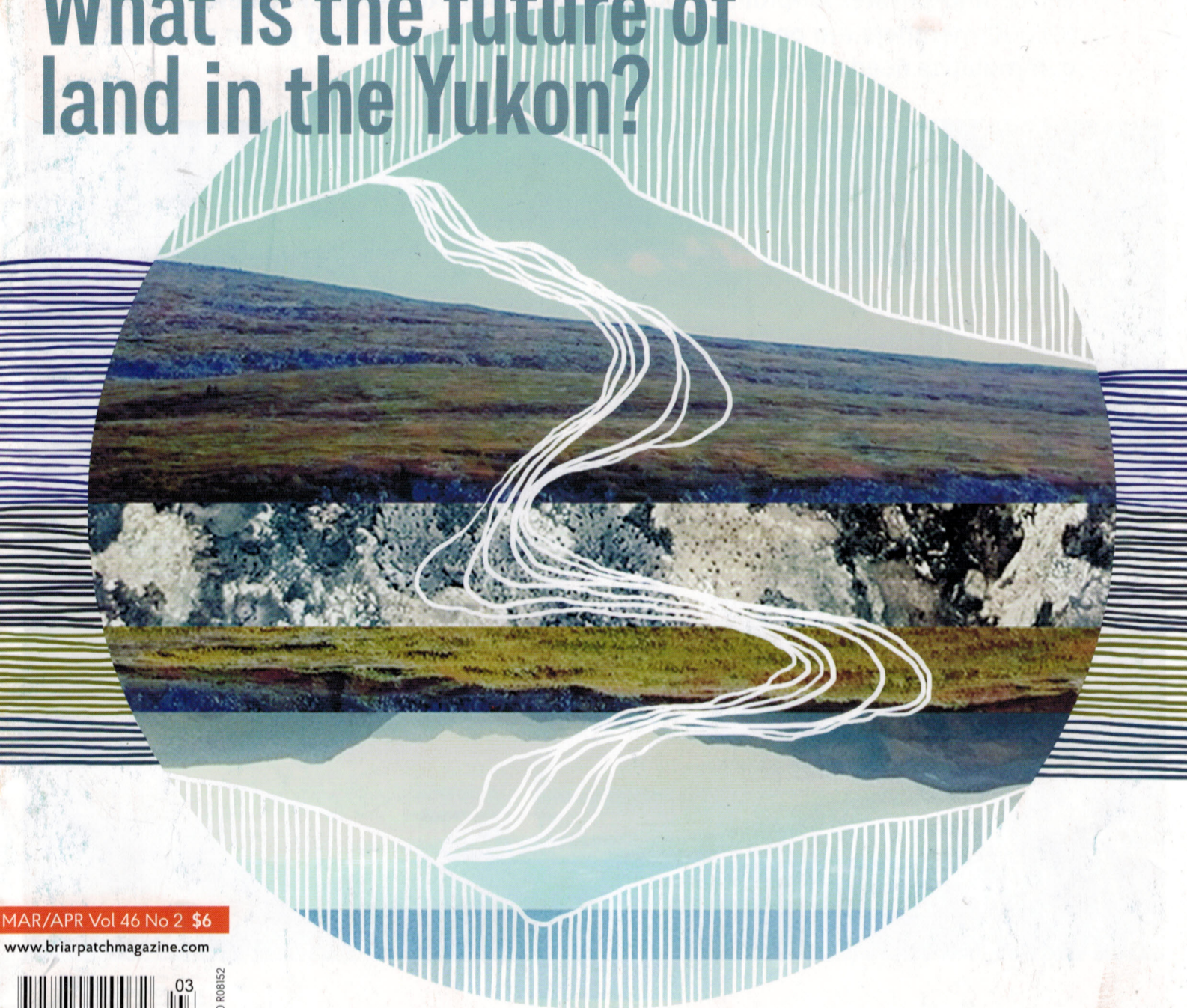




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Briarpatch (ISSN # 0703-8968) is published bimonthly by Briarpatch Inc., a non-profit organization. Subscription rates for one year: \$29.95 within Canada. Low income rate: \$18.05. Unions, libraries & institutions: \$39.98. U.S. orders add \$15, overseas add \$20. To subscribe, visit [briarpatchmagazine.com/subscribe](http://briarpatchmagazine.com/subscribe) or call 1-866-431-5777.

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Briarpatch is indexed in the Canadian Periodical Index and Alternative Press Index and available on microform from the Alternative Press Collection, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346, U.S.A.

HEY, POSTMASTER  
Publication Mail Agreement No. 40016360. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to 2138 McIntyre Street, Regina, SK S4P 2R7.

KARMA  
Briarpatch is printed with vegetable-based ink on Forest Stewardship Council® certified paper by union labour. We are a reader-supported publication.



Funded by the  
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# briarpatch

FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

## Features

### 4 The New Threat Threshold

*What Project SITKA reveals about the surveillance of Indigenous activists*  
BY KYLE CURLEW

### 8 Decolonizing the Toilet

*University of Cape Town students are uprooting ideological traces of apartheid*  
BY PATRICK LYNN RIVERS

### 14 Obsidian Stone Wiya

*Writing contest winner: creative non-fiction*  
BY JOELY BIGEAGLE-KEQUAHTOOWAY

### 18 No Line In Time

*Writing contest winner: poetry*  
BY SONJA GRECKOL

### 22 Bombardier in Israel

*A Canadian company's complicity in Palestinian dispossession*  
BY DAVE THOMAS

### 26 Modern Treaty Politics in the Yukon

*How the state deploys politics of recognition to maintain control over Indigenous lands*  
BY LIANNE CHARLIE

### 30 The Anti-Somali Feedback Loop

*Thirty years of harmful media representations and legislation shouldered by Somali*  
BY HAWA Y. MIRE

## Departments

### 2 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

### 21 QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND

### 34 REVIEWS

*The Bonnot Gang: The Story of the French Illegalists*  
By Richard Parry

*Without a Glimmer of Remorse*  
By Pino Cacucci  
REVIEWED BY CHRIS KORTRIGHT

36 *War in the Neighborhood*  
By Seth Tobocman  
REVIEWED BY YUTAKA DIRKS

40 *PARTING SHOTS*  
*Not in my backyard, or anyone else's*  
BY HELENA SEIFERLING



## What's behind the sweet tweets?

We always appreciate letters to the editor at *Briarpatch*, and I recently found myself considering what it would be like to open a letter like the one Ursula K. Le Guin penned to the editor of *The Oregonian*. Le Guin, a novelist and poet best known for her science fiction, was responding to another letter that had likened the "alternative facts" of the Trump administration to science fiction. "The comparison won't work," she wrote. "We fiction writers make up stuff ... and we call it fiction because it isn't fact." She continued, "A lie is a non-fact deliberately told as fact. Lies are told in order to reassure oneself, or to fool, or scare, or manipulate others. ... Lies are seldom completely harmless, and often very dangerous. In most times, most places, by most people, liars are considered contemptible."

While it's true that lying is the Trump administration's *modus operandi*, on this side of the border, Prime Minister Trudeau is benefitting from the proximity by appearing to be the reasonable leader. Take the tweet he wrote after Trump signed the executive order banning Syrian refugees and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcomeToCanada"

This is a typical Trudeau strategy: respond with lofty language without following through with action. Trudeau's government has not done much to open borders: it has not revoked the Safe Third Country Agreement, which prevents refugees in the U.S. from making claims for asylum in Canada, nor has it raised its stifling cap on refugees set for 2017. As Martin Lukacs outlined in his piece for *The Guardian*, "many desperate and endangered people will not be able to come to Canada, despite there being groups ready to welcome and host them. Sparkling in his symbolism, Trudeau has been desultory in his deeds." Trudeau

undoubtedly benefits from being the comparatively progressive leader without openly resisting Trump.

This isn't the only example of Trudeau's sweet-tweet strategy. The early days of Trudeau's government were marked by his commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to the 94 recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. His public position on reconciliation starkly contrasted his approval of the Site C dam, and the LNG, Line 3, and Kinder Morgan pipelines, which had been staunchly opposed by First Nations. As Kyle Curlew explains in this issue's "The New Threat Threshold," when Indigenous peoples defend the land against pipeline expansion and resource extraction, the government doubles down on its defense of "critical infrastructure." Racialized surveillance, Curlew notes, is expanded and emboldened by Bill C-51, which Trudeau's government supports.

Trudeau's neoliberal positions, obscured by his sweet-talking strategy, will likely get higher returns as Trump normalizes fascism in the U.S.

Le Guin once wrote, "Resistance and change often begin in art, and very often in our art – the art of words." I hope this issue is a contribution to a political strategy that leverages art. In the cover story, "Modern Treaty Politics in the Yukon," Lianne Charlie examines the self-government agreement in the Yukon, introducing us to her political intervention: collage. "Collage, as theory or metaphor, accounts for and accommodates the chaotic, contained, and often contradictory life-worlds created by continued settler colonialism. It brings seemingly unrelated and diverse pieces ... into purposeful and productive juxtaposition."

This issue also includes the winners of our sixth annual writing contest. Each year, our writing contest invites inventive language to transport us to new

imaginings of politics and dissent. This year, Joely BigEagle-Kequahtoway's story "Obsidian Stone Wiya" impressed our creative non-fiction judge, Richard Van Camp, who called it "a novel in so few pages." Our poetry judge, Erin Moure, chose Sonja Greckol's poem, "No Line in Time," as the winner. Moure wrote in praise, "The poem's voice worries the relations between Treaty 6 that made this settlement possible, the 'Crown in Right' that granted settlers land in Township 55, the patriarchs, the education in which the real history of the land was absent, and the line as unbroken as the prairie that constitutes grandmother-mother-daughter..." We hope that you will enjoy these interventions in creative writing as much as we did. The winners and the honourable mentions will be posted online in March, and we thank our judges for their contributions to this project.

In the coming months, perhaps we should keep Le Guin's words about the power of art close to our hearts. As we continue to defend our communities, we'll need renewal, strength, and growth, and coupling art and critique will be powerful. ★

TANYA ANDRUSIECZKO, EDITOR  
tanya@briarpatchmagazine.com

## ANNOUNCEMENT

After almost four years at Briarpatch, our publisher, Rhiannon Ward, will be moving on from the post at the end of March; we're incredibly grateful for Rhiannon's commitment to Briarpatch over the course of her tenure. We are excited to welcome David Gray-Donald as our next publisher! Writing regularly for Briarpatch and NOW Toronto on environmental and racial justice issues, and more recently as an editor and board member with the Media Co-op, David has experience with many sides of independent journalism. David studied environment and biology at McGill University.



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# The New Threat Threshold

What Project SITKA reveals about the basis of pernicious surveillance of Indigenous activists

BY KYLE CURLEW

ILLUSTRATION BY DERRICK CHOW





It was early November 2016 when Russell Diabo received a phone call from an APTN reporter, who told him that his was the only name that hadn't been redacted from a recently released RCMP intelligence document. The document, outlining Project SITKA – a police operation tracking Indigenous activists “who pose a threat to the maintenance of peace and order” – was acquired through an Access to Information request filed by Carleton University researcher Jeffrey Monaghan. It revealed that the police were following 89 activists who met “the criteria for criminality associated to public order events.”

Project SITKA tracks activists organizing around natural resource development (fighting oil pipelines and shale gas expansion), anti-capitalism (G20 and Occupy activists), the missing and murdered Indigenous women inquiry, Idle No More, and land claims. The report concludes that the protesters “pose a criminal threat to Aboriginal public order events,” though it concedes that “there is no known evidence that these individuals pose a direct threat to critical infrastructure.” This proof of surveillance sent a chill through the activist community.

Although Diabo – member of the Kahnawà:ke Mohawk Nation, activist, and policy analyst – is likely not one of the 89 activists under RCMP surveillance, he is named in the RCMP document as a representative of Defenders of the Land, an organization founded in 2008 that mobilizes around Indigenous sovereignty. The organization and several other advocacy groups “are identified within the report, yet are not a part of the analysis,” the report reads, suggesting that Defenders of the Land is on the RCMP’s radar despite its lack of criminality.

This was a disturbing revelation for Diabo, who told *Briarpatch*, “I found it interesting that in that document I was the only name that wasn’t redacted. Everybody else was redacted. I do say [in a statement that the RCMP flags in the report] that Canada has a war with First

Nations ... [a]nd the government – well, certainly the RCMP – think[s] my ideas are a threat.”

“Now, I can understand that for some security reasons they would argue that, yes, they have to do this, but I think that they’re going pretty far beyond what they need to do. And without oversight, I wouldn’t trust the police or security agencies in Canada to be fair in how they are policing the country. Or even assessing people who haven’t even done anything.”

Diabo is not the only activist affected by invasive surveillance programs. Blockades against pipeline construction on Indigenous land, and acts of civil disobedience to resist colonial expansion invariably involve the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and the RCMP watching and recording.

## DOMESTIC SECURITY THREATS

The Project SITKA report is emblematic of a larger issue in national security intelligence and policing: the emphasis on prioritizing “critical infrastructure.” In the years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., national security in North

Laden,” explains Monaghan, a criminologist at Carleton University.

The elevation of public safety as a national security concern led to the development of intelligence coalitions and fusion centres that focused on the cooperation of government agencies, including the RCMP, CSIS, and municipal police forces.

Over the past 10 years, “critical infrastructure” has emerged as one of the central priorities of national security policing as the government began to fear terror attacks against economic projects. It is a broad and ambiguous legal term that includes almost any infrastructural project in Canada, and it is frequently invoked to shield private industry. For instance, shortly after the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain and Enbridge Line 3 pipelines were approved by the Trudeau government in late 2016, Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr assured his audience of business leaders in Alberta, “If people choose for their own reasons not to be peaceful, then the government of Canada, through its defence forces, through its police forces, will ensure that people will

*Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S., national security in North America has been reinvigorated and prioritized in ways that haven’t been seen since the end of the Cold War.*

America has changed shape to respond to a new level of global threats. It has been reinvigorated and prioritized in ways that haven’t been seen since the end of the Cold War.

“Immediately after 9/11, there was a bureaucratic reordering that happened around public safety, homeland safety, [and] public preparedness. All kinds of money flooded into these bureaucracies, mostly rationalized, like Bill C-51, around the Taliban, al-Qaeda, [and] Osama bin

be kept safe.” His announcement signalled that the policing and intelligence agencies in Canada, empowered by the legislative arm, would go after protesters in order to protect the interests of the energy sector.

“It’s essentially made the police a kind of proxy security company for these industries who want pipelines to keep going into the ground and railways to stay open. When social movements like Idle No More disrupt private industry, they



make all kinds of noise ... for the RCMP to intervene and stop these protests," says Monaghan.

This close relationship between the energy industry and the RCMP was cemented in the 2015 Anti-terrorism Act, more popularly known as Bill C-51. The omnibus bill was introduced by the Harper government following the shooting of a military guard at the National War Memorial near Parliament Hill. C-51 aimed to overhaul Canadian national security law by granting CSIS expansive new powers, refocusing concerns toward "critical infrastructure," introducing invasive surveillance data sharing, and curtailing free speech rights surrounding "terrorism," among many other changes.

Though Bill C-51 was justified as a response to the threat of terrorism, like previous changes in the national security apparatus, it is also a tool of social control against activists. As Micheal Vonn, policy director of the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association (BCCCLA), explains, C-51 "imports a completely new definition of what constitutes a national security concern in Canada. The act recasts the threshold of concern to something that 'undermines' the security of Canada, not threatens it."

This reconfiguration of threat thresholds forges protest as a danger to public order, casting it as a national security

## CONSULT AND DISTRACT

From September to December 2016, the federal Liberal government held an online public consultation on amending C-51. With the launch of the consultation, the government published a backgrounder called the *National Security Green Paper*. The document positioned the government's goals as balancing security and privacy concerns to address "problematic" elements of the legislation. But the backgrounder itself revealed the government's partiality. As Privacy Commissioner Daniel Therrien warned, "[I]t focuses heavily on challenges for law enforcement and national security agencies, which doesn't present the full picture. Canadians should also hear about the impact of certain surveillance measures on democratic rights and privacy. A more balanced and comprehensive national discussion is needed."

While the consultation process was framed as addressing the act's unaccountability, CSIS's expanded powers, and implications for charter rights, the green paper read more like a sales pitch that sought to convince the public of the need for increased surveillance. In the area of digital technology, for instance, the green paper deliberately framed the stakes: digital technology "can also be exploited by terrorists and other criminals to coordi-

expression," despite the fact that surveillance of activists regularly occurs.

The issue of critical infrastructure was not up for discussion in the consultation, signalling the government's entrenched protection of resource extraction concerns. Diabo argues, "That's why I think Bill C-51 ... [is] the real threat, because that defines [Indigenous] activities as being threats to Canada's sovereignty, security, or territorial integrity. And by being born Indigenous peoples, we have to challenge Canada's security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity."

Even in the unlikely event that the consultation process results in policy that curbs surveillance, policing of critical infrastructure will likely remain unchanged, creating major implications for the work of anti-colonial activists. Given the deep-seated history of colonial expansion and violence in Canada, national security policing will disproportionately affect Indigenous protesters who protect the land through direct action. This has been the case with protests in Elsipogtog, and it will likely be the case in future resistance to the Kinder Morgan pipeline.

## RACIALIZING SURVEILLANCE

Simone Browne, a surveillance studies scholar at the University of Texas at Austin, has examined the effects of surveillance on people of colour and Indigenous people. Racializing surveillance is a particular layer of surveillance that reinforces notions of race and racial stereotypes, and determines who should be considered suspicious. Surveillance, in this sense, "does the work of arranging race within society," she says. The arrangement is almost always problematic.

"Settler countries rely on this national colonial fantasy of *terra nullius*. The idea of situating people who were brought here forcibly, as in slave labourers, or people who were subjected to colonization and genocide, as 'not belonging,' as others, as unfixed ... [t]hat narrative has not changed," Browne explains.

Surveillance practices, such as those

## *Policing and intelligence agencies in Canada, empowered by the legislative arm, go after protesters in order to protect the interests of the energy sector.*

concern. The government insisted that the act would avoid targeting "lawful" dissent and protest. But SITKA is evidence to the contrary. It demonstrates that national security surveillance is used to explicitly target those who are critical of the settler state, which has major implications for the imperative, and right, to dissent.

nate, finance and carry out their attacks or criminal activities," it read. Empirically, this is true, but the framing functions to ensure that there is no sensible option but to encourage public consent to surveillance in its current iteration. Where the green paper discussed activists, it asserted that Bill C-51 does "not include activities of protest, advocacy, dissent or artistic



highlighted in the Project SITKA document, become markers for racializing and criminalizing Indigenous peoples. "Anyone who is challenging the state or any types of legislative or policing acts

especially dangerous, allowing the state to routinely ignore the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; C-51 empowers judges to authorize charter infringements in secret hearings when CSIS deems it

*The government insisted that Bill C-51 would avoid targeting "lawful" dissent and protest. But SITKA is evidence that national security surveillance is used to explicitly target those who are critical of the settler state.*

becomes seen as suspect prior to ... doing anything that might be suspicious," says Browne.

To question the legitimacy of a settler-capitalist state in those terms provokes a response that construes dissent as a national security concern. "Movements that declare their own self-determination and demand nation-to-nation status and reject the notion of Canadian sovereignty – they're all seen [by the state] as belligerent, which increases their levels of threat," Monaghan asserts.

Diabo's politics brought him under the scrutiny of national security agencies like the RCMP and CSIS. His critical analysis of the sovereign authority of the Canadian state appears to mark him as a threat to the established order. Other Indigenous activists are flagged for meeting the RCMP's criteria for serious criminality, and they remain flagged for public-order surveillance. The gaze of national security spies doesn't flinch.

## ----- REPEAL AND REBUILD

As Vonn points out, Canadian security agencies operate in a culture of impunity that normalizes and facilitates law breaking under the excuse of "noble illegality." In other words, they are able to justify their careless treatment of the law by declaring it in the public interest. Between the discourse and culture normalizing noble illegality and anemic legislative oversight, Bill C-51 becomes

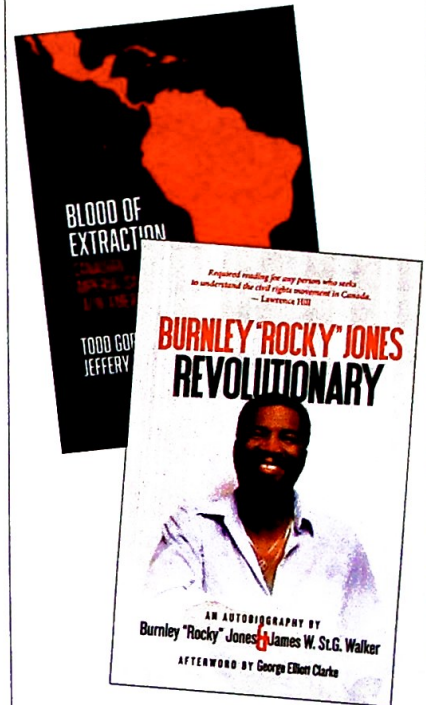
necessary to "take measures" against suspected threats. When the construct of threat reflects settler-capitalist logic, the entire process becomes dangerous for those who dissent.

In 2017, as the state cheerfully promotes its official celebrations of Canada 150, communities are strengthening calls to end pipeline expansions, the state's co-optation of reconciliation, and all violence against land and Indigenous women and two-spirited people. The revelations of Project SITKA are chilling, but they should also provoke vigorous organizing against surveillance itself. Surveillance cannot be treated by organizers as an ancillary issue, or as a routine cost of organizing. With the deregulation of surveillance and policing, we can expect that abusive practices will threaten the very potential to resist in meaningful, foundational ways. As Vonn warns, "It is very, very hard to turn something around once it has already been installed." This means we must organize now, or risk losing the right to freely organize at all. ★



KYLE CURLEW is an MA student of the sociology of surveillance at Queen's University, a freelance journalist, and an academic activist. He writes to expose surveillance issues in technology, media, and politics in order to inform the public of the threat of ubiquitous watching.

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# DECOLONIZING THE TOILET

*At the University of Cape Town in South Africa, the student-led Fallist movement is seeking institutional transformation that would uproot the deeply embedded ideological traces of apartheid and colonialism.*

BY PATRICK LYNN RIVERS

ILLUSTRATION BY MELANIE LAMBRICK

Just off a first-floor common area at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in South Africa, there is an unofficial washroom. This washroom is on UCT's upper campus, which sits upon the eastern gradient of a mountain called Devil's Peak. Overlooking the low-lying Cape Flats, where most of the city's "non-whites" and poorest live, geography serves as metaphor in a city where municipal officials boast that there is now one "full-flush toilet" per 4.3 households, up from one per 9.6 households in 2006.

In an academic building named for the late revolutionary apartheid opponent Neville Alexander, the washroom is significant because of its availability to everyone. Signage reading "Toilet" in laser print on a sheet of A4 paper has been posted on the entry door, replacing the

men-only sign that I remembered from the 1990s. Just beyond the washroom's entrance, to the right, stand urinals with modest partitioning while, to the left, cubicles span nearly floor to ceiling, with doors lockable from the inside.

No official reason was offered to explain why this particular washroom has shed its binaried designation. Adding to the mystery, someone keeps putting up a competing sign, this one with a stick figure denoting a man. The competing signage might signal something banal if the standard pictogram gendering the washroom had simply fallen off. But that's not what is happening. The informal signage, which forces users to rethink gender, signals that some type of decolonizing movement is taking place at UCT.

## #RHODESMUSTFALL

Since March 2015, UCT students have been galvanized by the decolonizing politics of the Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement (#RhodesMustFall), pursuing a set of disparate demands under a single banner. It has spurred popular debate beyond the Cape Town campus to other South African campuses and to Oxford University in the UK.

Rhodes Must Fall and related movements like Fees Must Fall were at one level born of a desire to remove a statue of 19th-century imperialist Cecil John Rhodes from its prominent perch on UCT's upper campus. Rhodes – infamous for his desire to "annex the planets if I could" – owned the land upon which UCT is situated as well as huge swaths of land throughout





## Rhodes Must Fall was at one level born of a desire to remove a statue of 19<sup>th</sup>-century imperialist Cecil John Rhodes from its prominent perch on UCT's upper campus.

southern Africa also legally stolen as imperial booty.

On March 9, 2015, UCT student Chumani

Maxwele threw a bucket of shit at the Rhodes statue, sparking a series of protest actions: students publicly holding university officials to account for multiple injustices, related teach-ins, and confrontations with security forces on campus, leading to tear-gassing and arrests.

Debate proliferated on national talk radio and television news programs, not to mention the country's social media landscape. The evening television newscasts on the public broadcaster and the major independent station tended to highlight the demand for the statue's

removal and damage to property. More extensive or systemic coverage of the protest came from print and radio talk shows, with opinion pieces in the former and program guests on the latter coming from RMF leaders and a wide range of their critics. Whites, especially older whites, mostly condemned the protests as the uncontrolled act of ungrateful young people privileged enough to receive a university education on land donated by Rhodes. Even some South Africans of colour with liberation struggle credentials found the extensive student demands excessive.

of a sizeable crowd. Student-led protests had succeeded.

Beyond the symbolic politics of the statue, though, RMF activists sought to decolonize the university. The complexity of their decolonial politics made another speedy victory more complicated and less assured. UCT student activists sought institutional transformation that would uproot deeply embedded ideological traces of apartheid, and the colonialism that had survived apartheid's formal end in 1994.

Students at UCT are resisting the binaries that characterize post-apartheid

Within a month of the RMF protests commencing, UCT officials had the statue removed to the cheers



remnants. They see a South Africa where whiteness has been privileged and deemed supreme while "non-whites" have been denigrated. To some RMF student activists, gender, after apartheid, has continued to be regulated using conventional masculine-feminine norms without full recognition that many people fall outside these gendered boxes.

To student activists, decolonizing UCT must include racially transforming

## RACIAL NOMENCLATURE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Racial nomenclature can be tricky in South Africa – hence my use of quotes around "non-white" and "coloured."

Underlying "non-white" is the binarized assumption that "white" is the norm against which diverse "other" groups are racially measured, with "other" groups being inherently inferior to whites.

"Coloured" – a term referencing those of "mixed race" – is contested because it underlies white supremacy's power to name the "Other." "Black" is preferred over "coloured" by some because "Black" reflects self-naming and it connects the racial struggles of groups oppressed by white supremacy. That said, many proudly embrace "coloured" because it distinguishes a rich culture.

faculty demographics, not just the student body. As noted in a November 2014 statement by Max Price, the university's vice-chancellor, only four per cent of South African professors are Black Africans in a Black African-majority nation. Yet, without sensing the boast's hollowness, Price heralded 72 per cent as the proportion of UCT's non-academic staff of colour.

Decolonization as a transformative act that moves the campus from an apartheid and colonial norm to a post-apartheid sensibility should also, according to RMF student activists, include a new curriculum that reflects the African context as opposed to Europe's. As far back as 2004, UCT's student representative council asserted in the Student Transformation Charter that "education is not a neutral phenomenon, but an ideology." Calls for "Africanisation" of the curriculum meant that African scholarship should be "incorporated into [the] research, teaching and curriculum of the university."

Student activists driving RMF have also tied their decolonizing activism to, among many causes, tuition-free higher education (#FeesMustFall), the labour struggles of subcontracted campus workers who are disproportionately Black and female, efforts outing sexual violence concealed by university administrators and the larger society, and LGBTQ struggles against cisgender heteronormativity.

The UCT Trans Collective, a group consisting mostly of trans students of colour but also gender non-conforming students and allies, has articulated its concerns to the university community within a decolonizing framework consistent with RMF. They have readily linked the most progressive RMF positions to a politics consistent with decolonizing the toilet.

One year to the day that Maxwele threw shit at the Rhodes statue, the university's Centre for African Studies gallery hosted an exhibition titled "Echoing Voices from Within" that looked back at UCT's RMF movement. RMF activists contributed many of the exhibited items from their own RMF archives, and the show was co-curated by a graduate student active in the movement and a member of the gallery's professional staff. Trans Collective activists crashed the exhibition, objecting to the fact that the event's organizers had failed to recognize trans leadership in RMF: naked trans activists with red paint on their bodies blocked gallery entrances and passageways, and defaced some exhibition images and objects.

A statement posted to the collective's Facebook page the next day, March 10, 2016, relayed a more detailed and defiant, yet forward-looking, explanation of the group's action at the opening. The collective specifically accused Black cishet men (i.e., straight Black men whose gender aligns with the gender they were prescribed at birth) and complicit Black cishet women at UCT of using the show to reimpose colonial and apartheid binaries upon Black trans bodies. In line with American critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, UCT's Trans Collective embraced and asserted the intersectionality of their race, class, gender, and sexuality, including within RMF: "Our role has now evolved into speaking back to RMF and keeping it accountable to its commitment to intersectionality precisely because it is positioned as a black decolonial space." The collective concluded: "There will be no [decolonized South Africa] if black men simply fall into the throne of the white man without any comprehensive reorganisation of power along



## To student activists, decolonizing UCT must include racially transforming faculty demographics, not just the student body.

all axis[sic] of the white supremacist, imperialist, ablist[sic], capitalist cisheteropatriarchy.”

Today, RMF and related student movements – particularly Fees Must Fall – remain divided along race, class, and gender, not to mention party affiliation and other lines. The collective’s visibility has receded and its members are now hard to find. RMF itself has given way in prominence to Fees Must Fall as a different kind of decolonizing movement focused on securing wider access to university education for those most impacted by colonialism and apartheid. “Fallism,” as student activists characterize their revolutionary aspirations, is currently a precarious undertaking.

### NON-GENDERED WASHROOMS

Washrooms should not be forgotten in the political mix. Public spaces like washrooms exemplify the banal acceptance of gender binarism. Historically, their designers have helped to spacialize public washrooms as places where masculine-feminine norms prescribe who can use which facilities. The gender binarism embedded in public washrooms has survived apartheid’s formal end, even as separate “white” and “non-white” washrooms are so clearly absurd and anachronistic to us in 2017. At its most revolutionary moments, RMF, along with campus groups like the Trans Collective and Queer Revolution, helped South Africans see the toilet as a site of colonial struggle, with gendered toilets being monuments to patriarchy and cisgender supremacy contiguous with the same rationales used to normalize white supremacy under colonialism and apartheid. Thus, RMF ideals, as

championed by the Trans Collective, have made one public washroom in UCT’s Neville Alexander Building a site of decolonial struggle.

In August 2014, before RMF had escalated and the Trans Collective had admonished the group, UCT had officially designated a single “gender-neutral” washroom complete with inclusive signage. This washroom is a multi-stall facility, with two cubicles instead of a single-stall washroom (the latter basically being a standalone washroom with a single toilet and sink, like home units).

This official non-gendered washroom was represented by university officials and in press accounts as a progressive development, though not a decolonizing one. But this washroom remains the only official non-gendered facility on the part of campus where most of the institution’s 26,000-plus students, as well as a large swath of its faculty and staff, study and work. Everything else that might be considered non-gendered is single-stall and more likely intended for people with impairments.

In September 2015, a little more than a year after the university heralded its designation of one non-gendered bathroom, the Trans Collective rebelled against the creation of this washroom economy – that is, the disproportionate lauding of efforts to install only one non-gendered washroom: it removed gendered signage on multiple campus washroom stalls. The university administration’s self-congratulatory focus on the single gender-neutral washroom was, for the collective, the way that the

institution perpetuated the privileging of cisnormativity.

Washrooms without

an official gender designation have burgeoned on South Africa’s post-secondary campuses since UCT’s 2014 rollout, primarily to recognize trans identity and to acknowledge the need for the trans community to have comfortable and safe facilities. But official designation of non-gendered washrooms has not kept pace with the need to have public facilities on campus where people work and study.

### TOLERANCE TRAP

Northeastern University sociologist Suzanna Walters might call the current provision of non-gendered washrooms at UCT a “tolerance trap.” To Walters, the framework of tolerance neutralizes queer political power when tolerance is misread as a progressive act. In *The Tolerance Trap*, Walters writes, “Tolerance is not an embrace but a resigned shrug or, worse, that air kiss of faux familiarity that barely covers up the shiver of disgust.”

The underlying power asymmetry of cisgender supremacy isn’t fundamentally challenged by a limited number of washrooms without gender designation, or by dispersed single-stall washrooms really intended for use by people with impairments.

Finding a solution beyond tolerance requires considering the multiple levels at which decolonizing the toilet works in South Africa and elsewhere. To start, different stakeholders want different things, and think differently about non-gendered washrooms. For the Trans Collective and trans students, there is a practical need for a washroom they can freely use. There is also the very political Trans Collective



## Gender binarism as embedded in public washrooms has survived apartheid's formal end even as separate "white" and "non-white" washrooms are so clearly absurd and anachronistic to us in 2017.

desire to rupture gender binaries. The collective's progressive solution interestingly overlaps with the fix sought by university administrators. The plodding reaction of the administrators who've implemented solutions should be read as an attempt to keep students quiet, and to stay out of the headlines, as well as to advance the institution's educational mission that reflects European culture more than the cultures of Africa.

Ultimately, liberation from the sexual and gendered binaries bestowed by the Enlightenment and reiterated through colonialism and apartheid is possible in part when there are multiple non-gendered washrooms with multiple stalls (nearly if not completely floor-to-ceiling, for privacy and safety) and no urinals (which are gendered objects). Outside the North American norm, these facilities should not have the openings at the bottom and on the sides, since that provokes policing and diminishes people's security.

### RENDERING THE DECOLONIZED TOILET INVISIBLE

Tish White, coordinator of the Wits University Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Advocacy Programme, in 2014 took a different approach and organized a series of meetings with transgender students. Gender-neutral washrooms were high on the list of trans students' concerns. Two years after the meetings, Wits, located in the South African economic hub of Johannesburg, has multiple multi-stall, gender-neutral washrooms located throughout its campus.

White told me that multi-stall washrooms made the most sense for Wits. The

university started by "converting" multi-stall washrooms to non-gendered spaces as opposed to "creating," or outfitting, new multi-stall toilets. Conversion, said White, is easy; the major cost comes from new signage. The new facilities benefit the institution's trans community, as well as people with impairments and parents whose gender differs from that of their children.

Spaces like the non-gendered washrooms at Wits are important in both symbolic and transformative veins. According to White, "gender-neutral toilets are a key component of the decolonizing project" that significantly start to undo sex-gender binaries that were not necessarily as binary before colonization, as documented by Gay and Lesbian Memory in Action (GALA). Thus, for White, "implementing gender-neutral facilities challenges the cisnormative legacy of colonization."

These washroom politics in South Africa are beginning to expand into spaces beyond the universities. In at least one suburban Cape Town primary school, administrators have begun to consider gender inclusion over tolerance. Rose-Anne Lawrence Reynolds, former Head of Inclusive Support at the multiracial and multicultural Pinelands North Primary School, which has almost 500 learners from multiple socio-economic classes, told me that space recently became available adjacent to the school's sports field. Administrators decided to convert the space into a non-gendered washroom with multiple stalls at minimal cost.

Likewise, the long-term goal is to convert most gendered washrooms at the school to non-gendered washrooms.

Early reservations from parents receded with more information.

One day, the young learners at Pinelands North Primary may be post-secondary graduates who will, upon their arrival at UCT, look for washrooms. By then, there may be real moves toward decolonization, and perhaps these students will not have to look too hard. By then, maybe non-gendered washrooms will be commonplace. UCT students who had attended Pinelands may then only know washrooms, in the broad sense – with the labour of decolonization perhaps so successful as to be unnoticeable. ★



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# OBSIDIAN STONE WIYA

BY JOELY BIGEAGLE-KEQUAHTOOWAY

ILLUSTRATION BY LAUREN CRAZYBULL





come from a long line of buffalo hunters.

*The blood and spirit memories from our ancestral buffalo hunts course through my veins to prepare me for today. I feel the sweat dripping down my forehead. The dust is dry and thick, kicked up by thundering buffalo hooves. I crouch, my legs aching from waiting for the signal from the hunters. I watch them get into position. Some of the hunters are dressed in wolf fur – they are nimble and run bent low. They chase the buffalo toward the hunters that are lined up facing each other. These are the brave ones, chosen by the Elders within our community, for they stand in the path of the buffalo. They jump up and down, waving their buffalo robes to keep the buffalo from veering off the path. The route is wide enough for a small herd of buffalo to flow through, guided toward the jump. The buffalo in the front of the herd realize too late that the ground is no longer beneath their feet. The others behind them push the ones in front to the edge. They quickly tumble off the cliff. It's too late for any of them to turn back; they are frightened by the wolf-robed hunters in chase behind them.*

I saw this buffalo hunt manoeuvre played out many times as a child, although I was never allowed to help; I needed to observe it first to know what to expect. I have now inherited my grandmother's, my *unci's*, obsidian stone. Its black sheen and pointed flint edges make it the perfect tool for its intended deed. This stone is the sharpest tool known to our people and if used properly, it can cut through anything, including the thick hide of a buffalo.

My *unci* would take me to watch the hunters chase down the buffalo and lead them to the jump, telling me that it was my destiny to eventually help with the buffalo kill at the bottom of the cliff. My

mother, my *ina*, would wait at the bottom of the cliff with her own obsidian stone. She was a skilled buffalo killer and was one of the few trusted to skin buffalo hides. I was to follow in her place when I was old enough. Until then I watched from afar with my *unci*.

My most prized possession as a child was my obsidian stone. The stone had been carved into a sharp tip and attached to an antler so I could hold it in my hand. When I was younger, I would help my *unci* as she skinned gophers. Then I graduated to deer, elk, and moose. It was all preparation to be a buffalo hunter and to help with the final kill at the bottom of the jump.

Only the most skilled buffalo hunters were allowed at the hunt. The buffalo

did not suffer needlessly. If the buffalo did not die from the fall, then it was my duty to ensure a just and swift final blow for the sake of its spirit. It was a contract we made with our buffalo brothers and sisters, to ensure their journey to the spirit world was completed as painlessly as possible. We wanted them to journey to the spirit world in a good way, knowing their sacrifice was not made in vain.

My *unci* and my *ina* started preparing me when I was a baby, singing the buffalo songs to me. As soon as I could speak, I sang to the buffalo spirit. The dreams didn't come easy at first. First I heard the rumbling, the loud *hummmph* and the wind howling as they ran past. At times I would dream I was running with them,

**I HAVE INHERITED MY GRANDMOTHER'S, MY *UNCI'S*,  
OBSIDIAN STONE. ITS BLACK SHEEN AND POINTED  
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PROPERLY, IT CAN CUT THROUGH ANYTHING.**

robes were the most prized possessions of our people. To kill and skin a buffalo, you must be careful not to make any holes in the fur hide. The robes would be used to keep our people warm on the coldest of winter nights. I feel honoured to be taught these old ways. I was proud to be chosen to help alongside the other hunters. It is humbling to be present when the buffalo spirit takes its last breath – the sacrifice made for our people to continue living.

I have infinite respect for our buffalo brothers and sisters, and I wanted to honour their spirits by making sure they

darting between them, one of them. Other times I would fly above them, soaring high overhead and watching, learning, wishing to be close. I loved their animal stench, and their fur felt downy near the neck and rugged at their hump – I wished I could stroke their fur. I felt at ease only when in their presence or as I watched them prance. I looked forward to the buffalo hunt each year because it was when they returned to us.

I loved the energy in the air from my people, when we would begin preparing for the hunt. The men would send



## I RUN TOWARD THE BOTTOM OF THE HILL AS THE BUFFALO TUMBLE AND FALL FROM THE CLIFF ABOVE. I HAVE ONLY ONE CHANCE FOR MY OBSIDIAN TOOL TO FIND ITS MARK.

scouts out to find where the buffalo shook the ground. We would break camp and travel miles to set up camp near the grazing buffalo. The men would prepare themselves mentally, emotionally, and spiritually for each buffalo hunt. The boys wanting to shed their innocence would be called upon to challenge themselves and prepare to hunt their first buffalo. The hunters would paint symbols of their animal or spirit protectors on their bodies with mud and earth paints. Their bows and arrows, parfleche shields, and obsidian spears would be smudged with the smoke of sage and sweetgrass, and the wooden handles painted to ensure their target was found. The women would sing the buffalo song to advise the buffalo to prepare themselves for the sacrifices to be made. We relied on the buffalo for life – they sustained us. We needed the buffalo to nourish and carry us forward for future generations. We had to think of our unborn children, grandchildren, and those yet to come. We needed to be strong for those yet unborn. These ways have been passed down to us through the generations, and our method was always the same to ensure a successful hunt. There was ceremony, but also protocol that we followed. Each hunter knew their place in the hunt, and we laid tobacco down when a kill was complete in order to honour the buffalo's sacrifice and their life with one of our most valued medicines.

Our community was large and filled with strong men and women, so we hunted in waves. One buffalo could feed 50 people. We would make buffalo pemmican, mixing their meat with berries and animal lard. The pemmican would last us through the winter. The best parts

of the buffalo – the tripe, the tongue, the liver – were saved for the babies and the sick Elders. The buffalo noses were saved for the *heyokas* – the noses would appease the spirits and these healers carried special medicines when they performed the buffalo ceremonies for the people and danced the buffalo dance. Every part of the buffalo was salvaged and used by someone in our village.

*I am older now, and I feel ready to help in my first buffalo hunt. I talk to my Elders and tell my unci and ina that I want to help my people. They tell me I must prepare myself through a purification ceremony. It's an enormous burden to take the life of a buffalo. We are so connected that when the buffalo spirit leaves the animal, sometimes it wants to take the human spirit with it. So, we have to guard our spirits during the buffalo hunt.*

*The women and men sweat separately for this purification ceremony. The songs are different, and the Elders have specific instructions for the men and for the women*

*the hunter the other being the buffalo, then switch roles. One day it will be their turn to be on the prairie hunting real buffalo.*

*I cry hard in the sweat lodge. I am happy, but also sad because I don't want to take my buffalo brother or sister's spirit away. I love watching them run free and play with one another. It makes my spirit feel free. It keeps my dreams alive. But the Elders tell me that the buffalo love us and that they want our people to live forever, so they are willing to sacrifice their life and happiness for our survival. It has been that way since the beginning of time. I have to believe I am fulfilling my destiny and that they are too. It is the only way to continue and to take my role in the tribe as a buffalo hunter and robe skinner.*

*I run with a group of women toward the bottom of the hill as the buffalo tumble and fall from the cliff above. Some buffalo jump up and run, limping away. I have only one chance for my obsidian tool to find its mark, and I must act swiftly to plunge my obsidian into the buffalo's neck. The stronger men and women pull the heavy animals away from the bottom of the hill. As the other buffalo are dropping from the cliff, we have to be quick and kill intently to ensure our food stays in place. We carry the burden of guaranteeing that we have enough buffalo meat for our people to survive the long, frigid winter on the plains.*

*I meet my first buffalo brother at the*

## WE CARRY THE BURDEN OF GUARANTEEING THAT WE HAVE ENOUGH BUFFALO MEAT FOR OUR PEOPLE TO SURVIVE THE LONG, FRIGID WINTER ON THE PLAINS.

*on their duties during the hunt. We each sing our buffalo songs in the sweat lodges. We pray and sing, pray and sing, and tell stories of previous successful hunts. In between sweat lodge rounds, we joke, and some tell stories of heroic acts or misguided adventures during the hunts. Laughter fills the camp. The children run, jump up and down, and crouch, pretending to be buffalo hunters. They take turns, one being*

*bottom of that cliff. I look into his eyes as he rolls toward me. I know I've been waiting for this moment all of my life – but now, faced with the task at hand, I can't do it. I'm frozen. I look into his eyes and start crying.*

*Then I hear him. He tells me, "You need to take away my pain. If you are my sister, you will do the right thing. Take your obsidian tool and plunge it into my neck. Do it quickly, as I must leave this earth. I am one*



of the chosen ones, and I will take my rightful place where I came from. Then you must eat my heart. I will be yours forever and you will be mine forever. I will live on through

myself strength, and to honour what has been said by my buffalo brother. I remember my unci's and ina's words and I leeleleelee again and again. Four times I leeleleelee

entering my blood as I take my initial bites of my first buffalo kill. The heart is still beating.

We will always be one with the buffalo. They are in our blood and we are a part of their spirit. Forever connected, forever bonded. No force alive in the universe will separate us, for as long as the wind blows, the rivers flow, and the sun shines.

I am a buffalo hunter. ★

**"TAKE YOUR OBSIDIAN TOOL AND PLUNGE IT INTO MY NECK. DO IT QUICKLY, AS I MUST LEAVE THIS EARTH. I WILL LIVE ON THROUGH YOU. NEVER FORGET ME. TELL YOUR CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN ABOUT ME SO THAT THEY WILL HONOUR MY SPIRIT AFTER YOU HAVE PASSED ON TO THE SPIRIT WORLD."**

you. Never forget me. Tell your children and grandchildren about me so that they will honour my spirit after you have passed on to the spirit world. This is what has been told to me by my brothers and sisters. Our destinies are tied together for eternity. Do it! Take your obsidian and strike now!"

I leeleleelee as loud as I can to give

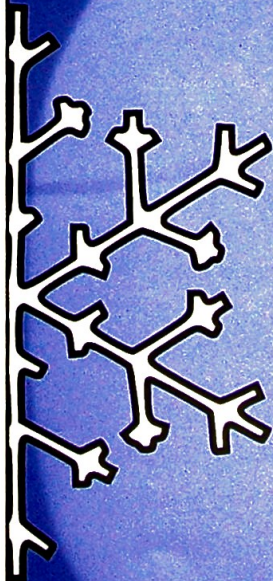
as I strike the spot I know will end his life. I take a deep breath in and out quickly so I do not force the buffalo spirit into my body. I can eat only his heart, and I save some of it for my unci and ina and the other hunters who are watching me, encouraging me. It all happens in a blink, but to me and the buffalo spirit, it lasts a lifetime. I feel the blood



**JOELY BIGEAGLE-KEQUAHTOWAY** is an artist working in a multitude of genres who enjoys sharing stories related to her Indigenous identity.

She writes children's stories about resilience, strength of character, and ceremonies. From the White Bear First Nation and residing in Regina, Joely is a mother of five children aged 6 to 27 and has a degree in mathematics and civil engineering.

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# NO LINE IN TIME

By SONJA GRECKOL

ILLUSTRATION BY SANDRA KNOSS





nibble syllable hold two notions wait to connect she\_I aims at the event absorbed into knowing dislodging  
the last rested pen-eye

unsettlers emigration-fuelled imaginations pall at landing shadows striated women strain open sterile eyes  
mean men made rigid snuffle sniffle leave belief trail tailings in scummy pond around a vale of broken bones  
teeth displacements bred resentment and entitlement in children closed to another history

Grandmas' lousy childhoods or immigrant mis|adventures leave a marl on your genes altering epigenetic  
expressions braiding anxiety or resilience

when the angel of science and the angel of history backed into each other verse junctures sluice she\_I time  
transits longitude and latitude

Treaty 6 great granddaughter to the boundary daughter signed Crown in Right assigned homestead Township  
SE25-55-14-W4 moonshine fine shone off calluses breaking bush broke the old country habits ways of flesh  
broke body bought bags purple and gold regal we thought brought by the queen we recited Crown Royal ruled  
and on the underside bootleggers triumphed correction lines of demonstrated the curvature of the earth

off by a distance measured from the north pole to magnetic north circling and failing a landing radar tones  
warnings defend 'empty' patriarchs perpetrated endogamy detonated all ease gasoline nailpolish books  
escape undergirded the a b cetera of daughtering flails mothering flails grandmothering

then's test patterns horizontals and obliques she\_I could adjust frames impenetrable crumbling pixels of  
news create recreate untested wherefrom hearts crystallize thorns and swords adjust the screens to story  
now's threats corporeal erratic unpredictable against patterns tested with other nows

propel false equivalence to enclose risk in a pronoun a speaker ravelling a destiny toward what wasn't before  
and arriving slant making word objects from confusion and shaping a wreckage she\_I moved steadily forward  
to the lines responsible to strange the estranged in time that unfolds unidentical to itself and in allatonceness

investments beget ownership land gold stock people and weapons territorialize legally and spiritually moulding  
to congeal possible interests she\_I pay attention when our aunt tells how her settler family weaponed  
to protect their homestead claim on a so-called warpath read hunting trading trail etched by horses now  
encaused by slide rule compass surveyed



give authority borders garments reap gather lay money clothe unclothe deprive dispossess vest vestment  
harvest invest investiture divest

injuries falling thru time met history untold at these longitudes but landed in bodies without memories  
wounded across time with unworded new world loss worded christian conquest in the new old world  
wounded else deemed other

eurocentric slug she\_I legacied monotheism history written by conquerors Pagan might have passed muster  
root and frame military ambush shed thoughts' tourniquets phoenician celt iberian yearn for a simpler  
orderly tale it is the elisions that dumb

social sciences education left she\_I empathic sluggish on larger knowledges dark ages in northern europe  
dank mouldy castles and hovels jousts beheadings taxation...then the crusades infidels made us dumber  
about our east

dark in the north she\_I learned was entire Medieval until light penetrated lattices reflecting pools geometry  
of the stars in polyglot empire past yore leaks through another sieve

word worlds trace lines and squibble centuries gold spices incense amber silk precarious stumbling camels  
rivers to outside [forene foreine foreyn] territories congeal my pen-eye now keyboard eye aims a compound  
eye canted on this ledge of unlearning the probe ship moor slav convicts powered pillage sounding castilian  
arabic hebrew creeping to Turtle Island conquest the straight up goal delivered from the Reconquista

mercury shimmered light shook foil conquest stories dapple plunder detritus worded the world astrolabeled  
speech quilted with expulsion storied the dark moor ★



SONJA GRECKOL resides in Toronto and is grateful for subways and bike lanes wherever. She published two poetry books, *Skein of Days* and *Gravity Matters*, and has taught, studied order and disorder in jokes, and conducted human rights and gender-based research. This poem is the beginning of a larger project which probes medieval Spain.



# QUOTES FROM THE UNDERGROUND



"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."

—FREDERICK DOUGLASS

"Boycotts are not just intellectual exercises, they have to work. We're not in it for fun, we're not in it to make a point. We're in it to gain our freedom and rights under international law and for that we have to be very strategic."

—OMAR BARGHOUTI  
*The Intercept*

"The anarchist, referring simply to etymology, is against authority. That's exact. He doesn't make liberty the causality but rather the finality of the evolution of his Self. He doesn't say, even when it concerns merest of his acts. "I am free," but "I want to be free". For him, freedom is not an entity, a quality, something that one has or doesn't have, but is a result that she obtains to the degree that he obtains power."

—ALBERT LIBERTAD  
*Freedom*

"Hooray for our band of happy ragged folk  
Tellin old stories and fireside jokes  
living for the music, the love and the laugh  
Hooray for the riffraff!"

Raconteurs and bowsies, rebels and tramps  
Travellers who ramble from camp to camp  
dodgers and swagmen, vandals and rounders  
Wandering hobo town-to-towners

Come join the circle of jolly fools  
Squatters and crusties who make their own rules  
Riverbed beggars, carousers and thieves  
Our only motto: anarchy

Hooray for our band of happy ragged folk  
Tellin old stories and fireside jokes  
living for the music, the love and the laugh  
Hooray for the riffraff!"

—CASEY NEILL AND THE NORWAY RATS  
*"Riffraff"*

"A bully uses superior strength or influence to intimidate or harm those with less power. Calling for an end to police brutality and needless death by police is not bullying. That our appeals are seen as an attack on police is absurd. What could be a clearer indication of anti-Black racism?"

—JANAYA KHAN  
*Now Toronto*

"Yet why should an artist's way of looking at the world have any meaning for us? Why does it give us pleasure? Because, I believe, it increases our awareness of our own potentiality. Not of course our awareness of our potentiality as artists ourselves. But a way of looking at the world implies a certain relationship with the world, and every relationship implies action."

—JOHN BERGER  
*Collected Essays*

"Especially for people of colour, our lives are so tied together with our politics. Everything we do is political in this nation and especially for women of Color. A lot of times the outlets we are left to express our politics is through our lives, so how we raise our children, how we laugh, how we engage in relationships becomes extremely political in a sexist white supremacist society."

—WALIDAH IMARISH/  
*Interview, GeoClan.com*

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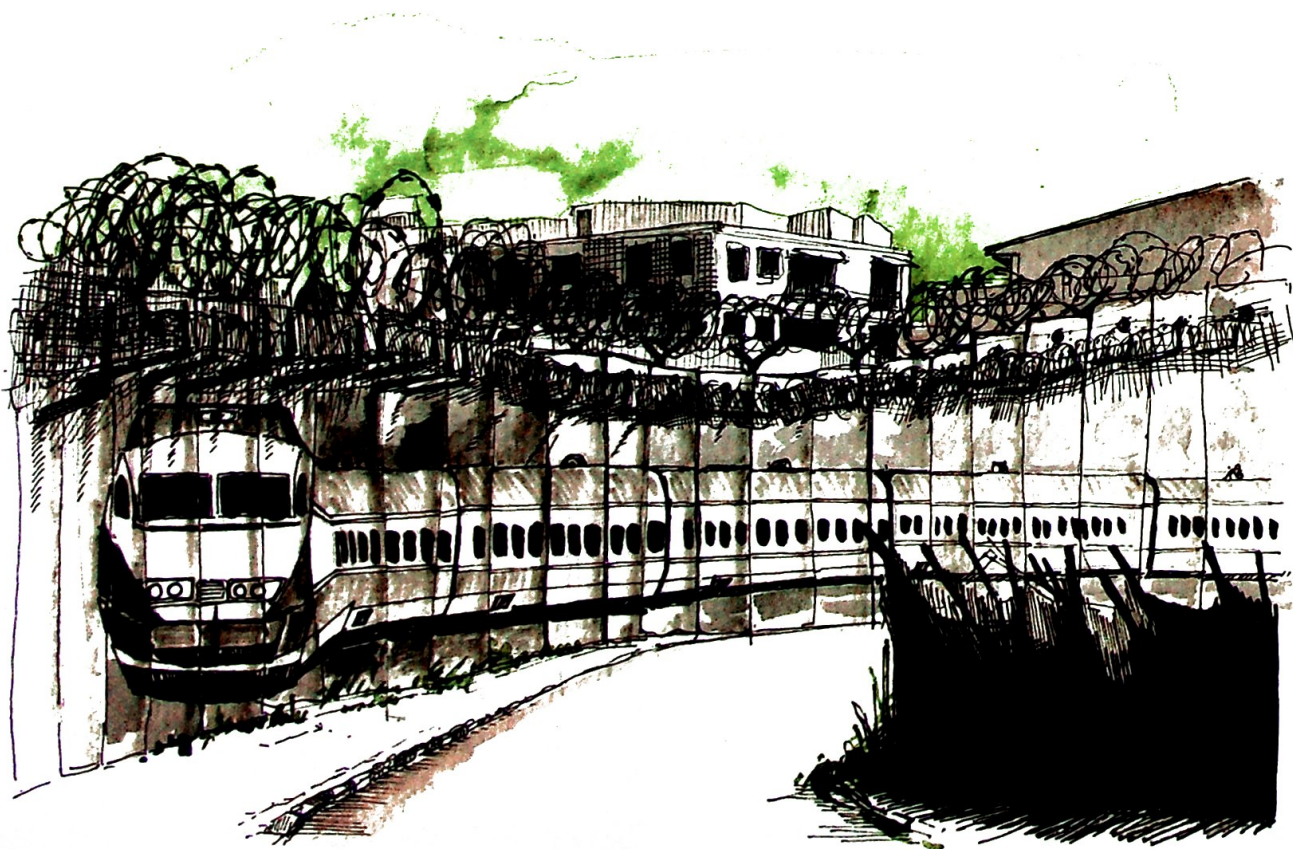
# Bombardier in Israel

## A corporation's complicity in Palestinian dispossession

*The Canadian corporation Bombardier is contracted to supply trains for a high-speed rail line in Israel that will travel across the Green Line and through the occupied West Bank – a blatant violation of international law. While Palestinians are fighting against this newest iteration of dispossession, many Canadians are financing and profiting from Bombardier's activities.*

BY DAVE THOMAS

ILLUSTRATION BY AMANDA PRIEBE





In two small Palestinian villages in the West Bank – Beit Iksa and Beit Sourik – residents have struggled against Israeli occupation and annexation of their land for many years. While the Israeli state has historically confiscated land around these villages to build illegal settlements and the separation wall, the most recent land seizures are for a different purpose – the construction of a high-speed rail line connecting Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, promising to move travellers over the 56 kilometres between the cities in 28 minutes flat. The route passes through the occupied West Bank in two places and crosses the Green Line – the demarcation line between Israel and its neighbours that was negotiated after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and held until 1967.

The Beit Sourik Village Council emphatically states: “We, the people of Beit Surik, do not want the train line to be built on our land. We see as fundamentally important that the people of the world support our right to decide on the use of our own land and help us change the route of this train line.” Despite these demands from Palestinians, the proposed train route has remained unchanged, and construction is proceeding as planned.

If you have not heard of these villages, or the A1 rail line in question, you are not alone.

Mainstream media in Canada tends to mute dissenting Palestinian voices from villages like Beit Iksa and Beit Sourik, despite the gravity of the situation they face. But the decidedly Canadian connection to this case cannot be ignored. Within one of the most deeply contested geographic spaces on the planet, aerospace giant Bombardier, with the support of the Canadian state, is supplying Israel with the trains that will run on the high-speed line upon completion. In the face of mounting evidence of the illegality of this project under international law, a long history of dispossession and colonialism for Palestinians, and the growing

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, Bombardier has established a long-term presence in Israel.

### A LEG UP FOR BOMBARDIER

Bombardier is one of the world’s largest global transportation companies, with revenues of \$18.2 billion in the 2015 fiscal year. Headquartered in Montreal, and with shares traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, Bombardier is a global giant in its two core business divisions: aerospace and rail transportation. It employs almost 71,000 people in more than 28 countries.

The Canadian state has played an important role in encouraging and supporting the success of Bombardier over the decades. Bombardier itself boasts that the government, through the Technology Partnerships Canada program, has invested \$142 million in the company’s research and development.

**In the face of mounting evidence of the illegality of this project under international law and a long history of dispossession and colonialism for Palestinians, Bombardier has established a long-term presence in Israel.**

Export Development Canada (EDC), Canada’s export credit agency, has also invested heavily in Bombardier, helping it to secure lucrative contracts abroad and providing financing to foreign companies to purchase products and services from Bombardier. The Canada Account, which finances transactions that EDC deems too risky but are still considered to be in the national interest, has dispensed financing at least five times in the past 15 years to support the sale of Bombardier aircraft.

Canadians are also both helping to finance, and profiting from, the work of Bombardier. Many Canadians own Bombardier shares, either through private

investments or managed pension funds. As of March 2016, the Canada Pension Plan owned \$11 million in Bombardier shares.

### BOMBARDIER IN ISRAEL

Bombardier began its relationship with the Israeli state and Israel Railways Corporation Ltd. – the state-owned rail corporation that provides passenger and cargo transport – in the late 1990s. Shortly after the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement was signed in 1996, executives from Bombardier accompanied dozens of other corporate representatives, Canadian politicians, and Jewish lobby groups on a trade mission to Israel. A second trade mission organized by the Canadian government followed in February 1999, which included two senior sales executives from Bombardier. The efforts of the Canadian state and Bombardier to enter the Israeli rail market began to

bear fruit very quickly. In the summer of 1999, the company received its first contract with Israel Railways to deliver four double-deck train sets. In the intervening years, Bombardier emerged as a major supplier of double-decker coaches for the transit system in and around Tel Aviv. The company has secured several contracts with Israel Railways since 1999, including the most recent deal

in 2015, worth \$340 million, to supply 62 electric locomotives, with an option for another 32 locomotives in the future.

### A1 AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

Initially scheduled for completion by 2008, the A1 rail line is now planned to officially open in 2018. The train route crosses into the occupied territory of the West Bank in two spots: first, the path dips into the West Bank in order to create the most direct route between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and second, it crosses the Green Line to accommodate Israeli citizens who opposed its construction close to their homes. In total, the rail line



runs for roughly six kilometres across the Green Line into occupied territory, though most Palestinians living in the occupied territories won't be able to use the train given Palestinians' restricted mobility rights in the areas at the ends of the line.

The fact that the train crosses into occupied territory raises significant legal concerns regarding the construction of the A1, most importantly regarding Israel's commitments under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which was adopted in 1949 and signed by 196 states. The convention outlines humanitarian protections for civilians in a war zone, including the rights of people under occupation. Of these, the most relevant sections for this case are articles 47 and 53. Article 47 notes that people under occupation cannot be deprived of their rights under the convention due to the annexation of land by the occupying power. Article 53 prohibits the destruction of property by the occupying power, "except where such destruction is rendered absolutely necessary by military operations." The

annexation and subsequent destruction of land to build the A1 rail line in occupied territory arguably constitutes a violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

In addition to Israel's responsibilities as an occupying power under the convention, the United Nations' Charter, General Assembly Resolution 2625, Security Council Resolution 242, and the International Court of Justice (ICJ)'s 2004 Advisory Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, all prohibit the acquisition of territory by force and uphold the self-determination of peoples. But the problem with international law is that it is rarely enforced against powerful actors, especially in this case, where the most powerful state in the world, the U.S., backs Israel.

It should be noted that the Israeli state takes the position that the rules and principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention, along with other aspects of international humanitarian law and human rights law, should not apply to the occupied Palestinian territories. This view is founded on the idea that the territories in question were not previously recognized as part of a sovereign state. This position was contested most clearly by the 2004 advisory opinion of the ICJ, when it ruled on the illegality of Israel's separation wall.

A report written by a Palestinian organization, the BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, summarizes the legal concerns

**In total, the rail line runs for roughly six kilometres across the Green Line into occupied territory, though most Palestinians living in the occupied territories won't be able to use the train given their restricted mobility rights in the areas at the ends of the line.**

with the rail line as follows: "In blatant violation of its obligations under international humanitarian and human rights law, Israel as the occupying power has, without military necessity, expropriated privately owned Palestinian land with the aim of constructing permanent infrastructure, ostensibly to serve the needs of its own civilian population."

The new A1 infrastructure is situated within historical and contemporary processes of dispossession in the region. After a long process of building the Zionist movement, the colonial project reached a critical point with what Palestinians refer to as the Nakba ("catastrophe"), when over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were expelled from (or fled) the land in 1948–1949, during the formation of the Israeli state. After the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel began its occupation

of several other territories in the region, including the West Bank. Since then, the Israeli state has gradually expropriated an increasing amount of the West Bank land to build settlements, checkpoints, and the separation wall. Abu Shadi, the head of the local council of Beit Iksa, says, "[T]he checkpoint, the fence, settlement expansion on our lands, settler attacks, soldiers in the valley. The train is just one part of it all."

Although the total distance of the rail line running through occupied territory is minimal – roughly six kilometres – Palestinians in the area assert that it will cause damages and obstruct their self-determination. In a letter calling for international support and intervention in

2010, the Village Council of Beit Sourik argues, "This train line would bring inconvenience and suffering to the village in terms of the lost land and in noise pollution, without any benefits, as the train is to connect areas that village residents, with West Bank ID cards, are not allowed to enter." Beyond the immediate

and direct consequences of the rail line for Palestinians in the region, there is an equally important matter of principle regarding the annexation of these small pieces of land. Each small incursion and seizure contributes to a much larger picture of dispossession.

#### UP AGAINST BDS

Bombardier is quick to dismiss any suggestion that its work in Israel is problematic. Asked by a reporter for *Mamon*, a sister publication of *Ynetnews*, about the significance of the railway going beyond the Green Line into occupied territory, Dr. Lutz Bertling, former head of Bombardier's transportation division, replied, "This is not a problem. What do we provide? Railway systems to all residents, no matter their nationality. There is no apartheid in Israel. Eventually,



everyone stands to gain from a good and effective railway, in any area it passes through. As far as we're concerned there is a green light to participate in all bids in Israel, even in upcoming bids over the Jerusalem light rail. It's not in our DNA to deal with political issues."

Bombardier elides any notion that its work in Israel might have political, legal, or ethical complications, but of course, its operations are political. In fact, it is firmly nested within the context of the growing BDS movement directed at the state of Israel. BDS, in its own words, "works to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law." The movement was launched in 2005 by roughly 170 Palestinian civil society organizations as a non-violent mechanism to put pressure on the state of Israel. It is a call for assistance from the international community to boycott Israel's economic projects, and the academic, cultural, and sporting institutions that are complicit in the violation of Palestinian human rights; to withdraw investments in Israeli companies and international companies involved in Israel; and to pressure all governments and international governance bodies to end governance, military, and trade co-operation with Israel until Israel complies with international law.

In 2010, the Palestinian BDS National Committee unequivocally stated that the A1 rail project violates international and human rights laws. It urged "private businesses to immediately withdraw from the project." Activists in Germany and Italy picked up the call: the Italian coalition Stop That Train campaigned against the participation of their national firms that were involved with the project. Although the Italian firm Pizzarotti has continued its work on the project, a subsidiary of German state-owned firm Deutsche Bahn withdrew from the A1 rail line in 2011. Former German transport minister Peter Ramsauer announced at the time, "this Israeli railway project which runs through occupied territory

is problematic from a foreign policy standpoint and is potentially against international law."

For its part, Bombardier is just now beginning to encounter civil society opposition in Canada to its participation in the A1 line. In late 2015, Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) Canada, a national Jewish organization that calls on the Israeli government to comply with international law, posted a letter to Bombardier on its website publicly criticizing the company's president for his blasé response. It read, "I am disturbed to have read that Dr. Lutz Bertling of Bombardier stated that he has no problem with Israeli trains going beyond the Green Line, the internationally-recognized [sic] border of Israel."

Fortunately for Bombardier, Canadian governments appear openly hostile to the BDS movement. In January 2015, John Baird, Conservative foreign affairs minister at the time, issued a press release after his meeting with his Israeli counterpart, which read: "Canada will fight any efforts internationally to delegitimize the State of Israel, including the disturbing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) Movement." The Liberals do not appear to have altered the Canadian government's position on BDS. In February 2016, almost all Liberal MPs voted in favour of a Conservative motion condemning the BDS movement against Israel.

## ----- SHARED COMPLICITY AND THE WAY FORWARD

The legal and ethical implications of Bombardier's involvement in Palestinian territories extend beyond the scope of Bombardier itself, falling upon both the Canadian government and Canadian citizens at large. Global Affairs Canada's position that the Fourth Geneva Convention applies to the occupied Palestinian territories is inconsistent with Bombardier's work in supplying trains for the A1 high-speed line. The various ways in which Canadians finance, and profit from, the activities of Bombardier

overseas should provide reason for further scrutiny of this case.

In an interview with *The Intercept's* Glenn Greenwald, BDS co-founder Omar Barghouti noted, "Many people are realizing that Israel is a regime of occupation, settler colonialism, and apartheid and are therefore taking action to hold it to account to international law. Israel is realizing that companies are abandoning their projects in Israel that violate international law, pension funds are doing the same, major artists are refusing to play Tel Aviv."

As the BDS movement grows internationally, Canadians can and should play an important role in challenging the Canadian state and corporations like Bombardier. National organizations, such as Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East, IJV Canada, and the Canadian BDS Coalition, along with many other, more localized movements across the country, are already mobilizing Canadians to join the BDS movement.

This activism is crucial in light of the Canadian government's unwavering support for the Israeli state. According to Palestinian-Canadian activist artist Rafeef Ziadah, "Unlike the endless rounds of negotiations, BDS does not rely on the delusional belief in the goodwill of Western governments... As Israel's actions continue unabated, the task of building a capacity for pressure is more urgent than ever." The Bombardier case must be leveraged to interrogate the Canadian connections to this particular project, while also drawing our attention to what activists are doing to address the broader problems in the region. ★



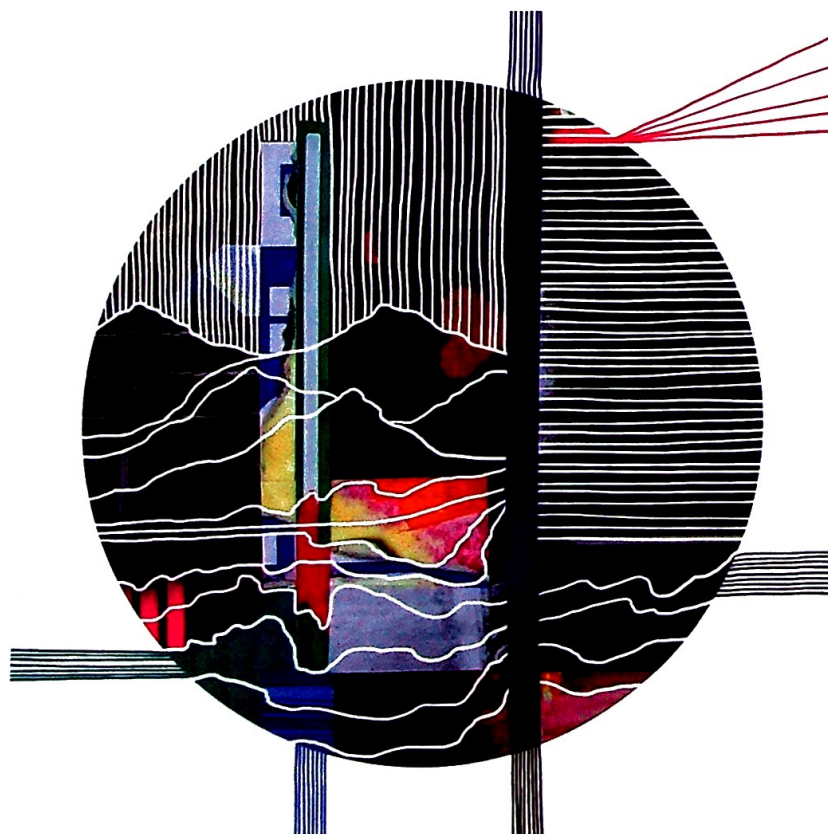
DAVE THOMAS is an associate professor in the department of politics and international relations at Mount Allison University on Mi'kmaq territory. His teaching and research interests focus on the role of Canadian actors abroad, and on international political economy.



# Modern Treaty Politics in the Yukon

How does the state deploy politics of recognition to maintain control of Indigenous peoples and their land?

WORDS AND COLLAGES BY LIANNE CHARLIE



**C**itizenship. A committee of five community members has been appointed by the council, the elected governing body of the First Nation, and tasked with determining the criteria and process for citizenship in the Nation.

They sit in a small conference room, inside of an office trailer. It is Monday night. Six o'clock. The summer sun is still high in the sky. Binders overflowing with loose paper cover the table. A lawyer is present, paid upwards of \$150 an hour to help the committee navigate the legal transition from Indian band to self-governing Nation. The committee spends the first hour clarifying terms – status Indian, non-status Indian, beneficiary, band member, effective date, enrolment – and debating whether citizens' personal information should be stored online or in hard-copy files. The majority of the Nation's members descend from over 40 original

families. Everyone knows who is who. The conversation about citizenship uses Canadian legal terms and draws upon the laws stipulated by the Indian Act, the Umbrella Final Agreement, the self-government agreement, and the Nation's 12-year-old constitution. Ancestral or cultural laws, concepts, values or practices, if present, are supplemental to Canadian terms and processes. Council has mandated that a citizenship act be drafted as soon as possible. Decisions tonight will shape the foundation upon which the Nation's citizenship is determined and legally enforced on their settlement lands. The doors are closed. The rest of the self-government administration has long since gone home. Apart from a few kids playing across the street in a gravel-covered field, the surrounding village is quiet. One of the aunties gets up and pours herself another cup of coffee.



Indigenous peoples are navigating political worlds that are made up of diverse and incommensurable pieces: a fundamental difference in Indigenous and Canadian governance systems and their relationships to and with the land; differences in political theories informing participation in, or disengagement from, Canada's settler state governance system; and an Indigenous desire for justice. The socio-economic pressures – lack of quality housing, underfunded education and health care, pervasive substance abuse, and poverty – exist at the same time that Canada insists on expanding natural resource extraction, forcing Indigenous communities to compromise and redefine their relationship with their land. The result is a very real tension between two divergent value systems: capitalism and the sacred.

The complexities of Indigenous politics are particularly evident in the Yukon, home to over 37,000 people, 20.6 per cent of whom are First Nations. The Yukon is unique in contemporary Indigenous politics because so much of the territory has been settled by land claims under a modern treaty.

In 1973, Chief Elijah Smith and a delegation of representatives from Yukon First Nations travelled to Ottawa to deliver to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau a position paper called *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow*, which called for a "fair and just" settlement with Canada and captured a desire, at the time, for redress: recognition in the form of a legal settlement, which was seen as a way of moving respectfully and responsibly toward a better future with Canada. And thus they initiated a modern treaty process in the Yukon.

Seventeen years of difficult negotiations later, the landmark *Umbrella Final Agreement* (UFA) was reached in 1988, and finalized in 1990, between the Council for Yukon First Nations (then known as the Council for Yukon Indians), the Yukon territorial government, and the government of Canada. Since 1990, 11 of 14 Yukon First Nations have been transitioning from "Indian Bands," governing bodies designed and administered under the *Indian Act*, to political entities that are, in theory, organized and managed by the First Nations themselves. The remaining three Yukon First Nations – White River First Nation, Ross River Dena Council and Liard First Nation – have outstanding negotiations.

The UFA has ushered in a suite of political changes in the Yukon. The *Indian Act* ceases to apply to First Nations that have signed a self-government agreement, and each First Nation's treaty rights are outlined in individual agreements. Self-governing Yukon First Nations have jurisdiction and

law-making abilities on their settlement lands. They can determine their nations' citizenry and can design and implement their own programming and governance.

Celebrated as a "modern treaty," the UFA is an example of a recent trend in Aboriginal rights movements in Canada that uses land claims settlements and self-government agreements to negotiate renewed legal and political relationships based on mutual recognition and reconciliation between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state. From the perspectives of the federal and territorial governments, agreements like land claims are important for establishing "certainty"; in other words, the agreements replace the ambiguity surrounding Aboriginal rights with defined treaty rights and title in clearly defined areas, and eliminate treaty rights and title in others.

Today in the Yukon, 8.5 per cent of the territory (approximately 41,595 km<sup>2</sup>) is settlement land, where Aboriginal title for 11 self-governing nations remains. For these 11 First Nations, Aboriginal rights and title have been extinguished on the remainder of their traditional territory. This is due to Canada incorporating "cede, release, and surrender clause" into modern land claims, forcing signatories to essentially sign over their rights and title in exchange for a new set of rights that can be expressed in designated areas.

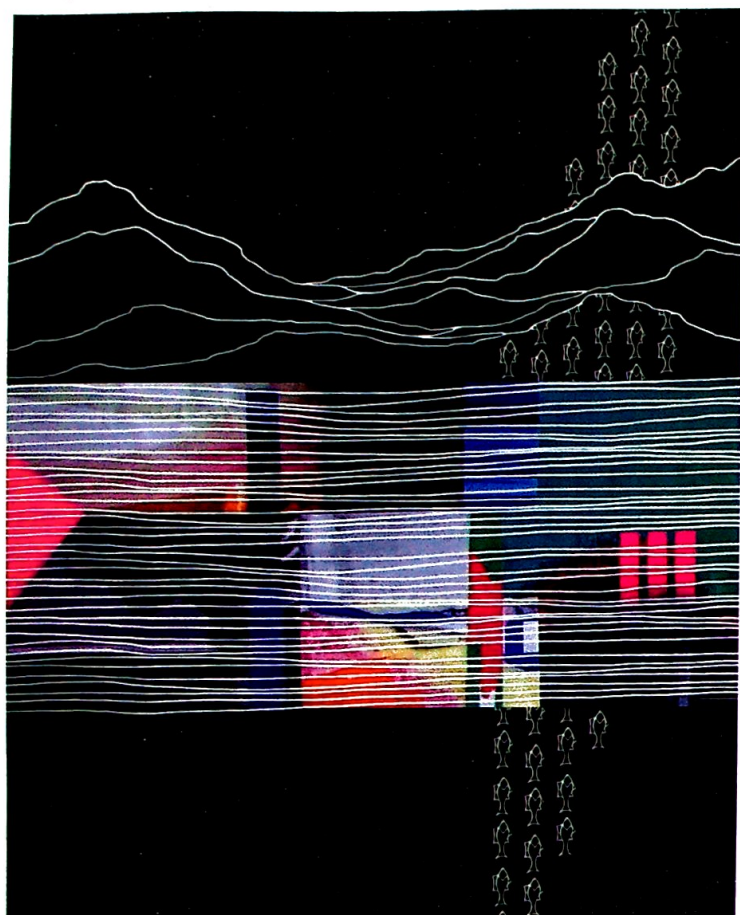
Land claims and self-government agreements are mechanisms of "the politics of recognition," defined by Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson as, "to be seen by another [e.g., the state] as one [e.g., Indigenous peoples] wants to be seen." Some liberal scholars, and certainly the Canadian state, consider recognition to be capable of righting the wrongs of historical and contemporary state-initiated injustices. From this view, legal and political recognition can

result in an affirmation of inherent rights and legal security, state-backed protection from development and encroachment, cultural protection and renewal, and material redistribution and economic gain.

But other Indigenous scholars and activists are drawing attention to the way that the state maintains control of Indigenous peoples and their land by using mechanisms of recognition, which are carefully constructed so as to restrict Indigenous peoples' ability to make autonomous decisions and ultimately dispossess Indigenous peoples of large tracts of their traditional territory. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard argues that the politics of recognition are state-serving at their core and merely extend the colonial project by repackaging land dispossession as "self-determination."

*From the perspective of the government, land claims are important for establishing "certainty": replacing the ambiguity surrounding Aboriginal rights with defined treaty rights and title in clearly defined areas, and eliminating treaty rights and title in others.*





*Resurgence. The forest floor is damp; the moss is thick and soft. My feet are wet and they're getting cold. I'm going to wear my insulated rubber boots next time, I think to myself. I see my cousin through the trees. She's gone back to the car to check on her baby, who is sleeping in the back seat. I scan the ground for bright clumps of blood-red cranberries. The ripe ones hang heavy on their little branches, drooping into the moss – they are hard to see. I learn quickly that the trick is to get low. At moss level, the ground comes alive with bursts of red against a backdrop of green lichen. I haven't picked nihtl'āt before. I'm not sure of the technique I'm supposed to use to pull the berries off their branches. I opt for a gentle tug with my fingertips. The ripe ones practically fall off with the lightest touch. I crouch on the moss in a spot surrounded by berries. I pick all the ripe ones within arm's reach and then stand up and take a couple of steps, careful not to crush any berries underfoot. I crouch and pick all the ripe berries within reach again, then stand up, scan the ground, spot red, step, crouch, pick. The berries make a light drumming sound as they land in my ice cream bucket: da-da-dum. I hear a twig crack in the distance and I look up to make sure it is not brother bear. It's not. It's just the forest making forest sounds.*

*I scan the ground, spot red, step, crouch, pick.  
da-da-dum.  
da-da-dum.  
da-da-dum.*

At stake in the implementation phase of the agreements is Yukon First Nations' ability to stave off the energy industry and Canada's interest in and demand for access to natural resource extraction in the North. Whereas recognition politics appear to be a new, benevolent approach to Aboriginal rights, this process only extends state influence over Indigenous lands, lives, and politics.

How are Indigenous peoples to navigate a political landscape in which Aboriginal rights and title have been legally extinguished in the majority of the territory? What does self-determination look like in a political landscape that makes Indigenous governance mimic Canada's and limits Indigenous jurisdiction to a fraction of the territory?

Scholars of Indigenous resurgence, like Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Glen Coulthard, and Audra Simpson, maintain that self-determination requires revitalizing our ancestral governance practices free of settler state control and interference. For these scholars, Indigenous self-determination is grounded in the resurgence of our people, lands, languages, and laws. Self-determination is enacted intentionally in the everyday and steadily advances us toward a radically alternative future, perhaps one that our ancestors might recognize.

While the UFA is extending certain, limited powers to Indigenous peoples, it is also facilitating government-backed industry access to Indigenous lands and resources. The UFA settlement lands are divided into three categories: land on which First Nations' surface and subsurface rights are recognized (Category A); land to which First Nations can claim surface rights but not subsurface rights to resources like oil, gas, and minerals (Category B); and fee simple settlement lands, where Aboriginal rights and title do not apply and, as with Category B lands, the Yukon government administers subsurface rights. Where First Nations have subsurface rights, they can regulate mining activities as they wish, issue title to minerals, and collect royalties. Where they do not have subsurface rights (Category B and fee simple lands), mining activity is treated as if it were on Crown land, governed by the territorial government.

The Yukon has legislated a free-entry system, which means that any mining prospector (an individual or a company) has the right to enter Crown lands – those that are not Category A lands – to explore for minerals and acquire rights to those minerals. While the ratification of the UFA has put some restrictions on industry access to Category A settlement land, it has opened up large swaths of Indigenous traditional territory that emerged from the "cede, release, and surrender clause." Only 8.5 per cent of Yukon territory is settlement land, and part of that includes Category B and fee simple lands that are open to staking. Despite the positioning of the modern treaty as a victory for Indigenous



control of the land, industry and settler state government bodies still have a significant say in relation to resource extraction. In the end, industry can now operate with *certainty* in areas where Aboriginal rights and title have been extinguished and where these lands are now largely controlled by the state.

Casino Mining Corporation, for example, is currently proposing a copper, gold, molybdenum, and silver mine project 300 kilometres northwest of Whitehorse. Currently in its environmental assessment stage, the proposed mining site is on Selkirk First Nation traditional territory, on land that has been ceded to the state. Post-UFA legislation does not require industry to work with First Nations. Involving First Nations in proposed projects on ceded land is carried out by industry as a courtesy only.

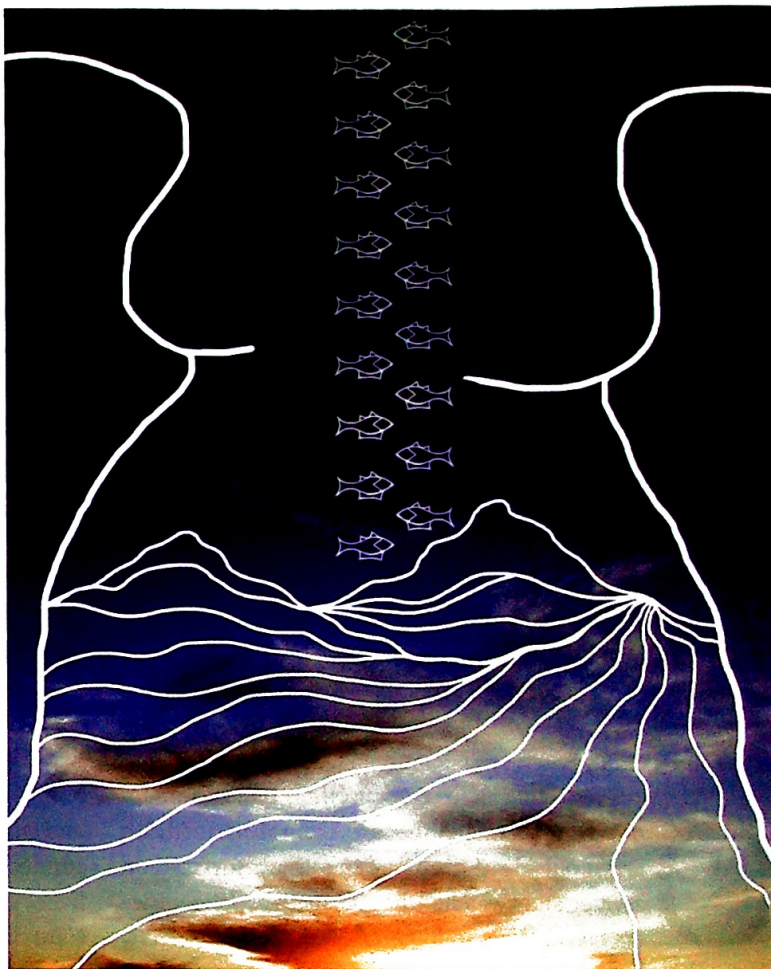
The UFA has created a number of co-management and environmental assessment processes (for example, the Yukon Environmental and Socio-Economic Assessment Board [YESAB]) in order to protect lands and resources and to increase Yukon First Nations representation on bodies that oversee various resources. However, YESAB can only put forward recommendations only. Despite the intention to balance power and increase Indigenous decision-making power in the territory, the UFA allows the territorial government to have final say on what can and cannot happen on ceded land.

While the UFA has bolstered access to previously curtailed decision-making power and law-making abilities, the benefits of which should not be minimized, we must still ask: what kind of future might we create if we prioritize the implementation of the agreements we have with our ancestors and our lands, rather than those we have with the Canadian nation state?

Indigenous collage may help work through this imagining.

Collage is an Indigenous methodology that emerged out of my own practice of creating digital photo collages. A collage, in its most basic and accessible form, is the result of combining an assortment of images and texts into an entirely new and reimagined image.

Collage, as theory or metaphor, accounts for and accommodates the chaotic, contained, and often contradictory life-worlds created by continued settler colonialism. It brings seemingly unrelated and diverse pieces – people, places, texts, images, contexts, experiences, practices, histories, traditions, ontologies – into purposeful and productive juxtaposition, essentially allowing for multiple and sometimes incommensurable elements to be placed within new proximities to one another. Collage invites us to interpret and respond to our political world in empowered and informed ways. We can determine which pieces we want to remove and which pieces we want to prioritize.



*Continuance. There is little light coming in the window. It is too early. The smooth logs of the cabin wall are pressed hard to my back. I'm facing the middle of the bed, where my cousin's seven-month-old baby is – or, rather, was – sleeping. He's awake now and wiggling around. His little hand touches my face. His tiny fingers go in my mouth. At home, in his crib, he'd have toys to occupy him, so his parents could get a few more minutes of sleep. Here at the cabin, the two people trying to sleep around him have become his toys. I try to sleep more, but it's impossible. His cooing sounds are too cute to ignore. I have to open my eyes and watch him. His mom is awake, too. The two of us lie there, smiling. His wide eyes stare back at us. In this moment, he is the centre of our world. Just outside the cabin door, Tagé Cho flows by, just as it did when our ancestors lay with their families in the early mornings, staring lovingly at their future. ★*



LIANNE MARIE LEDA CHARLIE is a descendant of the Tagé Cho Hudän (Big River People), Northern Tutchone-speaking people of the Yukon. Lianne is a political science instructor at Yukon College in Whitehorse, and she is pursuing a PhD in Indigenous politics at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Lianne's work is also on display on Instagram.



# The Anti-Somali Feedback Loop

The feedback loop between harmful media representation and legislation has imposed a massive burden on Somalis who arrived in Canada to escape war. For 30 years, it has impacted employment prospects, access to education and housing, and the freedom to swiftly rebuild lives.

BY HAWA Y. MIRE

GRAPHIC BY LORRAINE CHUEN

On July 24, 2016, videos of Abdirahman Abdi's arrest outside of his home in Ottawa surfaced on Twitter, and I watched the aftermath of police officers David Weir and Daniel Montsion senselessly beating him to death. Abdi was left face down on the pavement in full view of family, friends, and community members for 10 minutes. When paramedics arrived, they reported that his vital signs were absent and rushed him to the Ottawa Hospital in critical condition. Hours later, doctors informed his family that he had died 45 minutes before even arriving at the hospital. Abdi was a 37-year-old Somali man, unarmed, living with disabilities, and he had arrived in Canada in 2009.

Abdi's cries for help continue to haunt me even months later. His death captured national attention because Somali community leaders, Black Lives Matter – Toronto, and other allies and supporters actively brought attention to the ongoing systemic violence against Black people, despite deflection by police spokespeople. The president of the Ottawa Police Association, Matt Skof, took to public radio to argue, "Race, in this case, is a fact, just like your age, your gender, your height. It doesn't have anything to do with our ... decision-making. Our decision-making is based on our training, and our training has nothing to do with race." While these are not new statements made by Canada's police services, they were startling in the face of a shared traumatic event.

In the weeks following Abdi's death, his identities were described in various terms depending on what you read and listened to – Black here, Somali there, mentally ill here, Muslim there. Despite ongoing conversations led by activists, scholars,

and community members in both public and private spheres, a connection has not been drawn between his death and the larger history of abuses committed against the Somali community in Canada.

## THE SOMALI DIASPORA

The contemporary Somali diaspora refers to the mass dispersal of people from the Somali territories after the 1980s, following a number of critical environmental and socio-political changes, including a significant drought and sustained political conflict. The political upheaval in the Somali territories should be understood within the context of the ongoing legacy of European colonialism, which resulted in the African independence movement of the 1960s. Mohamed Siad Barre's presidency, from 1969–1991, and his government's use of Soviet military assistance quickened the collapse of an already fragile state. By the late 1980s, multiple attempted coups, failing socio-political infrastructure, escalating violence, human rights abuses, and a deadly drought had displaced hundreds of thousands of Somalis. In 1990, close to a fifth of the Somali population was believed to be living outside of the country. By 1992, over 1.5 million Somalis had fled as refugees and settled across Europe, the U.S., and Canada.

Somalis arrived in Canada in three major waves: the first group arrived in the early 1970s, and the second wave in the late 1980s. According to Somali scholar Abdi Kusow, "[r]efugee statistics in Canada suggest that in 1984 there were only ten Somalis in Canada. By 1991, this figure had increased to some 12,964 individuals." These first two waves were composed of people who



were well educated and had substantial financial means. By 1996, however, after the third wave, close to 70,000 Somalis had arrived in Canada, highlighting a drastic population increase and leading to a lack of social services to properly support those fleeing civil war. The 2011 National Household Survey estimates that there are 44,995 Somalis in Canada (mostly in Ontario), though other Somali agencies put that number much higher.

## MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF SOMALIS

On March 16, 1993, Canadian peacekeepers stationed in Somalia tortured to death 16-year-old Shidane Abukar Arone. Twelve days earlier, Canadian soldiers shot two Somalis, killing one. After photographs, testimonies, and documentation of the violence committed by Canadian peacekeeping soldiers surfaced, the embarrassed federal government launched a national inquiry into what became known as the Somalia Affair. However, the inquiry was shut down in 1997, falling short of a full investigation. For its part, much of the national media had focused on the incongruence between the violence and the national mythos of what CBC commentator Rex Murphy called "one of the few genuinely noble enterprises of our time: Canadian peacekeeping." As Sherene Razack writes in *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*, "The official story that emerged from the spectacle of the Somalia Affair – a spectacle that began with photos of the violent death of a Black man in custody and Black children bound and humiliated – was that of a gentle, peacekeeping nation betrayed by a few unscrupulous men."

Following the Battle of Mogadishu in October 1993, when two U.S. military helicopters were shot down by Somali civilian fighters, press coverage of the war again provoked strong reactions among Canadians. These stories hit news cycles as Somalis were arriving in Canada, and the refugees were met with increasing anti-Somali sentiment in Canada's media, which cast them as violent and uncivilized warlords, welfare bums, and nomads. The media stories that followed did little to focus on the resili-

Called *Dixon*; the *Fifth Estate* episodes "The Life and Death of Abdinasir Dirie" (2010) and "Crimes Against Humanity" (1992); the 2014 documentary on *The Current*, "No Man's Land: the story of Saeed Jama's deportation to Somalia"; and the 2016 television series *Shoot the Messenger*. In 2016, VICE Media also released their documentary *This is Dixon*.

Contemporary media portrayals of Somalis as criminals were perhaps starkest during the tenure of former Toronto mayor Rob Ford. The now-infamous leaked photo of Ford with his arms around three young Black and Arab men, which sparked the search for Ford's crack cocaine video, saw "Project Traveller" come to a head in June 2013: police stormed an apartment building on Dixon Road in pre-dawn raids that resulted in over 40 arrests of primarily young Somali men, many of whose families expect them to be released in March 2017.

Project Traveller began in June 2012, as police started following the activities of young Somalis that police insist are organized as a gang called the Dixon City Bloods. But many Somali community members say that no such gang exists – it is a construct used by the police to criminalize, profile, and monitor Somali youth living in the Rexdale neighbourhood of northwest Toronto. These media misrepresentations in documentaries and fictitious series have functioned to legitimize policies of Canadian institutions that continue to have broad implications for the Somali diaspora.

## SHIFTING LEGISLATION

With the wave of Somali refugees entering Canada in the early 1990s and the increased media reportage of the ongoing civil war, the Mulroney government introduced Bill C-86 in 1992, amending the Immigration Act of 1976. The government claimed C-86 would improve the securitization of the immigration process, ostensibly by preventing immigration fraud and intercepting criminal or terrorist organizations.

Bill C-86 required that those seeking permanent residency produce identification. This posed a challenge for Somalis: Somalia had lost the infrastructure to provide ID for its departing citizens, making proper identity documents impossible to secure. Despite the Canadian government's official stance that its strict new rules were intended only to streamline the immigration process,

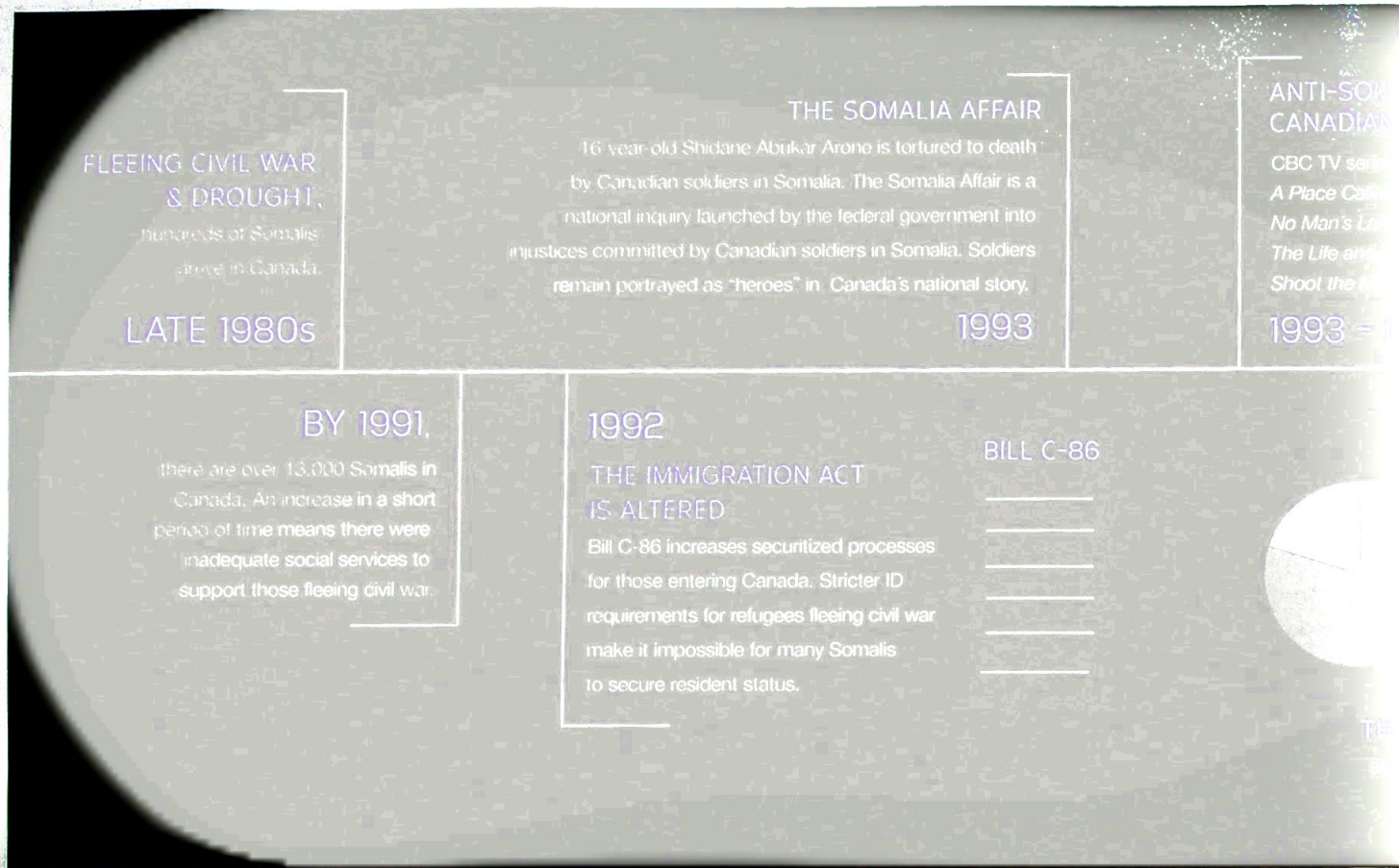
**These stories hit news cycles as Somalis were arriving in Canada, and the refugees were met with increasing anti-Somali sentiment in Canada's media, which cast them as violent and uncivilized warlords, welfare bums, and nomads.**

ience and resistance of Somalis who had fled a war and arrived in Canada with families and ambitions of their own.

Prevalent media representations, many of which have been advanced by the CBC, depict Somali youth as gang members, accessories to gangs, or terrorists. Among the CBC programs that cement these notions are the 1993 documentary *A Place*

Lucienne Robillard, the Liberal minister of citizenship and immigration, said in a 1996 news release, "Because they have no ID, we will not grant these people permanent resident status until they have time to demonstrate respect for the laws of Canada and for us to detect those who may be guilty of crimes against humanity or acts of terrorism." Bill C-86 created a





tiered citizenship system that affected not only Somalis, but also refugees from Afghanistan, Burundi, Sri Lanka, and Iran, continuing the legacy of picking and choosing who was a worthy candidate to become a Canadian citizen. The underlying tenor was that Somalis were not welcome in Canada, and in fact may never be allowed to be full Canadian citizens.

Though in 1997 the government introduced a measure called the Undocumented Convention Refugees in Canada Class, which allowed refugees from Somalia and Afghanistan who met conditions to get permanent residence status after five years, many Somalis remained in limbo, lacking the appropriate documentation to work, pursue post-secondary education, or access basic social programs to support their families. As late as last year, in conversations with Toronto-based settlement workers, many told me that they were still working with Somalis to secure documentation that should have been processed almost two decades earlier. The Canadian Council for Refugees has noted that the identification requirements from the 1990s have had negative long-term impacts on the ability of Somalis to access institutional resources and spaces available to Canadian citizens; in short, they could do little more than survive on the bare minimum. This has not only decreased the quality of life of many Somali-Canadians, but made it all but impossible to rebuild their lives from horrific circumstances.

Today, a large proportion of Somalis live in low-income

housing; by 2013, Somali was one of the top five languages other than English spoken by residents of the Toronto Community Housing Corporation. Eighty per cent of Somalis in Canada are under the age of 30, but youth unemployment among Somalis in Toronto is about 70 per cent. As of the 2006 census, 57 per cent of Somali-Canadians lived below the low-income cut-off in 2005.

While targeted legislation is responsible for foundational obstacles, popular media representations continue to construct narratives of Somalis as inherently criminal. It becomes clear that institutions inform one another's decisions to legitimize a shared desire to securitize Canada's borders and police Somali neighbourhoods.

The interdependence of media and government institutions is crucial to consider in the war-on-terror age of increasing surveillance and Islamophobia. Somalis, as a relatively new refugee community in Canada, occupy a unique political space that requires them to navigate the complexity of being both Black and Muslim. While legislation continues to tighten restrictions for those attempting to reach Canada, additional forms of control over Somali bodies are being developed.

The *Anti-Terrorism Act*, Bill C-51, is the newest iteration of legislative harm toward Somali communities. Bill C-51 was in part sold to Canadians by Conservatives posting on Facebook a screenshot from an Al-Shabaab video with the



SENTIMENT IN  
MEDIA NARRATIVES

features include:  
on  
Jama's deportation to Somalia  
of Abdirahman Dirie

## PRESENT

## PROJECT TRAVELLER

Dixon-area raids are legislated by Toronto city council and carried out by Toronto police, who make 40 arrests, mostly of young Somali men.

2013

## 80% OF SOMALIS

in Canada are under  
the age of 30.

## UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

young Somalis is almost 70%.



JULY 2016

37-year-old Abdirahman Abdi is beaten to death by police officers David Weir and Daniel Montsion. He was unarmed, living with disabilities, and had recently arrived in Canada.



warning, "Jihadi terrorists are threatening Canada." With a link leading to a petition in support of C-51, tropes of Somalis as warlords and terrorists were neatly manoeuvred back into the national imagination. This campaign, coupled with the news that Toronto police had been running a gang-prevention-program-turned-extremism-prevention-program in Toronto (in predominantly Somali neighbourhoods) for more than two years, is troubling.

Public Safety Canada has stated that community outreach and engagement is a critical part of its counterterrorism strategy; in their fifth round of funding, they distributed more than \$10 million over five years as part of the Kanishka Project. Lawyer Fathima Cader notes that the RCMP's counter violent extremism (CVE) programs are "targeted predominantly at Muslim and especially Somali communities – [to] expand counterterrorism efforts beyond law enforcement to involve civil society, including teachers, social workers and clergy. In the ways they surveil, stigmatize and harm marginalized communities, CVE programs mirror the community policing programs inflicted on broader black communities."

The level of CVE funding used to monitor Somali communities far exceeds the numbers of Somali youth engaging in terrorist activity. In fact, Somali agencies like Midaynta Community Services, in collaboration with the Ontario government, U.S. and Canadian consulates, and other national

security-based institutions, repeatedly grant CVE funding to host conferences countering youth radicalization that focus specifically on Somali communities. Meanwhile, institutional responses to the socio-economic challenges wrought by a legacy of citizenship exclusion remain inadequate. In conversations with front-line Somali community service workers, it becomes clear that CVE is often prioritized over social programs for employment and settlement. What does this mean for a community still dealing with the ramifications of harmful legislation?

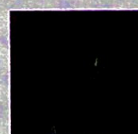
A refurbished narrative is being inscribed onto the Somali community. In the same way that Bill C-86 constructed a story of Somali warlords, Bill C-51 creates a new narrative of the Somali terrorist. The construction of the Somali body as requiring securitization has not changed in almost 25 years.

In this context, Abdirahman Abdi's murder is not special or unique.

Looking at Somali experiences in Canada is merely a specific way to understand the manifestations of anti-Black racism and subjugation of Black communities by the Canadian

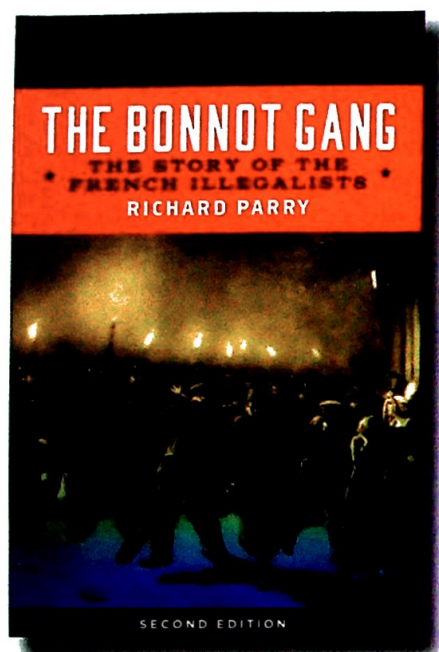
state. We cannot watch the killing of Abdirahman Abdi and not understand it as a public lynching, as white supremacy remaking itself using the same logics. Our complicity is in ignoring these interlocking systems of power. We cannot afford ambiguity or simplicity – we must insist instead on specificity, examining these particular locales as a way to interrogate power.

A colleague and I have begun Project Toosoo, a high-impact media skills development program that aims to create a pipeline of youth leaders who can respond to and challenge current narratives of Somalis in Ontario. Other initiatives are taking place across Canada, alongside increasing Somali representation in a wide range of professional fields. We cannot negate the power of media institutions in shaping our legislative realities. However, we must continue to ensure that these contestations become sites from which to make calls to action. Perhaps then we will develop a way to disrupt existing patterns and build a world in which we can thrive. ★



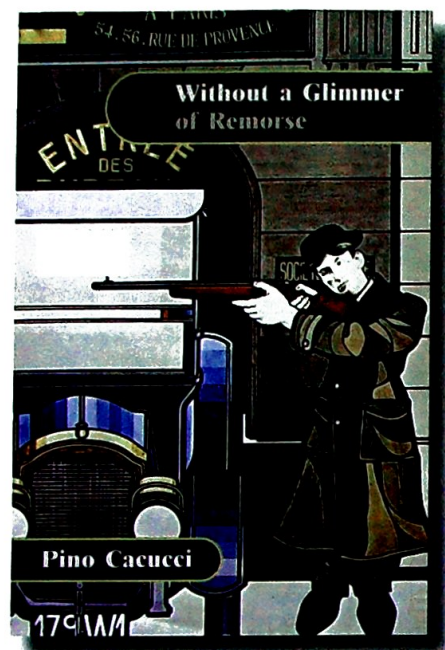
HAWA MIRE is a diasporic Somali storyteller, writer, and strategist who focuses on themes of Blackness and Indigeneity, (dis)connection and (un)belonging. A master of environmental studies candidate at York University, her research incorporates traditional Somali stories with discourses of constructed identity while pulling from archival histories of resistance and radical curatorial practices.





## The Bonnot Gang: The Story of the French Illegalists

By Richard Parry  
PM Press, 2016



## Without a Glimmer of Remorse

By Pino Cacucci  
Black Powder Press, 2016

Reviewed by Chris Kortright

Class war is usually envisioned as a mass movement, often under the umbrella of formal organizations like revolutionary parties or syndicalist federations. But is that the only articulation of class war? In 2016, two books came out looking at other forms of expropriation. Both books are reprints of classic texts exploring the French illegalists known as the Bonnot Gang, a group of individualist anarchists involved in forgery, counterfeiting, and, most notoriously, bank robberies and burglaries to support their insurrectionary politics.

The first book is *The Bonnot Gang: The Story of the French Illegalists* by Richard Parry. The second is the novel *Without a Glimmer of Remorse* written by Pino Cacucci and illustrated by Flavio Costantini. Each of these texts, in different ways – one historical, the other fictive – presents informative, engrossing, and exciting narratives exploring political and

personal revolt against society. The texts make you wonder: what if folk heroes like Jesse James, Bonnie and Clyde, or John Dillinger actually had politics behind their actions?

Parry contrasts the Bonnot Gang with "American antiheroes" and argues: "[T]he illegalists were consciously political, both on a personal level and in their view of the structure of the state and society. They are far more fascinating as individuals with their vegetarianism, teetotalism and belief in anarchy and free love as well as for their daring exploits." Their "daring exploits" included the expropriation of wealth from capitalists and other members of the bourgeoisie as a means of personal survival while funding anarchist projects. They also carried out acts of revenge against those responsible for poverty, exploitation, and violence.

Cacucci, meanwhile, explores the ideas of rebellion and action through a

fictional monologue by Jules Bonnot: "Hitting the exploiters with their fondness for the guillotine and for champagne in precisely what they cherished most, their purse. Not for the sake of lining one's pockets, but so as to repay them in kind for a little of the terror they spread, so cocksure that they were unreachable. And not with bombs, but at gunpoint, wresting back a fraction of everything that they were hiding from the millions in despair." While this passage appears as a fictional representation of Jules' perspective, it is also a vantage point through which to consider the perspective of many anarchists at the time. Specifically, many European individualist anarchists believed the act of expropriation was a legitimate form of revolt against the social order (capitalists, politicians, and the church). Expropriative anarchism, or "expropriations on the bourgeoisie," has been a practice of anarchist affinity groups



– most famously in Argentina and Spain by Buenaventura Durruti, Severino Di Giovanni, Miguel Arcángel Roscigna, and Lucio Urtubia – that has involved theft, robbery, scams, and counterfeiting currency. The French illegalists expropriated not only to finance anarchist activities; for them, it became a way to live.

Parry situates the Bonnot Gang's philosophies within a larger individualist anarchist milieu that was thriving in France in the interwar period. Founded by Octave Garnier, Raymond la Science (Raymond Callemín), and René Valet, the cornerstone of the Bonnot Gang's philosophy was the liberation of an individual's desires (that is, following one's desires rather than being crushed by the laws and morality of the church, state, family, and so on) and the drive to live a free life outside of or in contrast to the forced labour of the masses. Members of the Bonnot Gang were influenced by earlier anarchists: La Science was inspired by Mikhail Bakunin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and others were also influenced by Max Stirner's egoism. Cacucci explores these ideas through Jules Bonnot's meditations on Stirner: "Revolution has its sights set on a new organization; rebellion on the other hand prompts us to reject being organized any longer, but rather to look to self-organization and places no great hopes in institutions."

When the gang started out, the press referred to them as the "Auto Bandits" because they were the first gang to utilize an automobile for their getaways. Because of this, the gang had an edge over the French police, who didn't have access to the repeating rifles and automobiles used by the gang. The gang was later referred to as the Bonnot Gang after Bonnot – worker, soldier, chauffeur to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, and primary character in Cacucci's novel – walked into the offices of the popular daily newspaper *Le Petit Parisien* and, in an act of bravado, set his semi-automatic gun on a desk and complained to the journalists about stories they had been running about the gang.

It was also around that time that

Garnier published a letter in *Le Matin* mocking the police, challenging their "intelligence," and taunting them for their inability "to pick up my trail again." In the letter, he wrote, "Don't think I'm going to run away from your police; on my word, I believe they're the ones who are afraid." Addressing the police, he closed the letter: "Awaiting the pleasure of meeting you." These acts of defiance led to an increase in police funding of 800,000 francs; a bounty of 100,000 francs was charged as a reward for the gang's capture.

Eventually the police rounded up the gang's supporters and other anarchists, and the Bonnot Gang's spree of bank robberies, burglaries, and shootouts with police came to an end. André Soudy was arrested on March 30, 1912. According to Parry, "On his person they found the, now standard, loaded Browning, six bullets, a thousand francs in cash and a phial of potassium cyanide." Shortly after, in early April, Édouard Carouy and la Science were arrested. Cacucci describes the arrest: "Raymond was unable to draw any of the three pistols he had in his pocket because Sevestre brought the butt of his own pistol down on his head. At the Sûreté, Raymond retreated into absolute silence. Screams, threats and kicks proved useless. There was no way that he was about to talk." As April closed, the police had arrested or detained 28 gang members and supporters, but Bonnot, Garnier, and Valet remained at large.

"The walls of the old house bore the scars of gunfire and there wasn't a single pane of glass left intact in the window-frames," writes Cacucci, illustrating the famous shootout between police and Jules Bonnot on April 28, 1912. The police had tracked Bonnot to Choisy-le-Roi, a suburb of Paris. For some time, he kept the 500 armed police officers and soldiers at bay despite the Hotchkiss machine gun in their possession. Finally, the police chief sent three officers to place dynamite charges under the house, blowing up the entire front portion of the residence. Bonnot took cover in a rolled-up mattress and continued to shoot back at

the police. Ultimately, he was shot in the head. Roughly two weeks later, 300 police and 800 soldiers surrounded Garnier and Valet in an eastern suburb of Paris, Nogent-sur-Marne; the skirmish resulted in another dynamite explosion that killed Garnier and wounded Valet.

When the gang's survivors were put on trial, Victor Serge was sentenced to five years for robbery, and Eugène Dieudonné to life imprisonment. Carouy and Marius Metge also got life in prison, with hard labour. Metge was sent to a penal colony, while la Science, Étienne Monier and Soudy were executed by guillotine because they refused to plead for clemency. Like many classic anti-hero tales, these ones end with shootouts and guillotines ... but these rebels had an articulate anarchist politics of defiance as they looked into their executioner's eyes.

Both books are great individually, but when read together, they fill gaps created by the other's genre. Where Parry gives a detailed and documented history, Cacucci articulates emotion and subjectivity through his narrative. The only thing I found wanting in the texts was their treatment of the women involved as background subjects. These women were writers, journal co-editors, and active proponents of free love. They were also, importantly, involved in clandestine activities, and these two books would be richer if they engaged with the strong history of individualist-anarchist women. That said, both authors have a deep understanding of and sympathy for the philosophies and desires of the individuals involved in the Bonnot Gang, bringing out powerful accounts of this too-often ignored group in anarchist history. ★



CHRIS KORTRIGHT is an independent researcher and writer and has been involved in the anarchist milieu for many years. He is a collective

member of the new anti-authoritarian publishing project Changing Suns Press and writes a blog called Firebrand Dictionary.





## War in the Neighborhood

By Seth Tobocman  
Ad Astra Comix, 2016

Reviewed by Yutaka Dirks

I first encountered *War in the Neighborhood* in 2000, months after Autonomedia Press had published the weighty volume, a black-and-white graphic novel/memoir by New York artist Seth Tobocman.

When I first picked up the book, I was still giddy from my experiences of the anti-WTO shutdown actions earlier that winter. Tens of thousands of people had clogged the streets of Seattle, several thousand of us with the explicit aim of shutting down the entire city to prevent the gears of global capitalist exploitation from turning, if just for a day. Until November 30, 1999, I'd never before seen an impenetrable line of gas-masked cops marching in lockstep to clear the streets. I'd never before heard the deafening boom of flash grenades, never tasted the acrid chemical flavour of tear gas in the seconds before my sinus cavity burned with pain. I'd also never before experienced the euphoria of a city broken open, remade, if only temporarily, by the dreams of radicals.

I felt a similar rush of adrenaline reading *War in the Neighborhood* for the first time. The book is based on the real-life struggles of squatters in the abandoned buildings of New

York's Lower East Side during the late 1980s. It was the perfect picture of radical struggle, drawn in heavy strokes of black ink: heroic homeless activists from a working-class, immigrant neighbourhood with a long history of radical movements, who broke into and rebuilt derelict apartments, and defended their newly created community with love and rage while skull-faced police officers enforced an oppressive social system with batons and wrecking balls.

Tobocman's characters go to war with cops and landlords to "seize control of those things that make up [their] lives." There is The Maestro, a recovering heroin addict who helps smooth tensions among the squatters; Fran, who rallies local gay and feminist activists when police threaten to evict everyone from one of the buildings; Bomb, born in Loisaída (the Spanish name for the Lower East Side), who defends a squat by barricading himself inside and raining construction debris down on the police; and Seth himself, the comic artist. He'd supported the squatters by designing posters and leaflets, but soon he moves into the crumbling buildings with them.

Ad Astra Comix has re-released *War in the Neighborhood*



*Looking back at the anti-WTO mobilization, what I now find most inspiring aren't the street fights between the Black Bloc and riot police, but the spokescouncil of affinity groups, strangers to each other, which planned to shut down the city non-violently, and built the trust and commitment to actually accomplish the task.*

with a new foreword (written by AK Thompson) and a new afterword by the author. Tobocman considered the possibility of adding to or amending the re-released edition but ultimately chose not to do so. "Art contains the subjectivity of the author at the moment of production," he writes in the afterword.

So, too, is a reader's experience of art affected by their subjectivity.

When I revisited the 340-page comic book recently, my eyes focused on different images, details, and stories that my younger, more zealous self only half-read. For instance, the transgressions by white squatters that were excused or forgiven by the group (using drugs in the squat, displaying aggressive behaviour) were punishable by eviction when Black and Latinx members were at fault. Women were harassed, and physically and sexually assaulted by male squatters (white, Black, Latino), and they were disbelieved; even when the assaults occurred in full view of other people, a culture of victim-blaming ruled, allowing the violent misogyny to continue. The image of Joan, who gave years of her life to a squat called Deadlock House, having to live behind a solid steel door for protection from her fellow squatters, is devastating. In those moments, the book feels honest in a way that it doesn't when Tobocman falls into the easy, romantic visual rhetoric of struggle: cops drawn as pigs, Molotov cocktails "at their battle stations ... ready for war."

*War in the Neighborhood* remains relevant today. The Lower East Side Tobocman depicts is a ghost of its former self, the neighbourhood almost completely remade into a cleaner, costlier space for a different class of people. The same process is reshaping cities around the globe, from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside to Montreal's Saint-Henri neighbourhood: landlords

push rents ever higher, and condos for investors crowd out affordable housing for the poor.

There are powerful lessons to be learned from the experiences documented in the book: that people can become confident and empowered through struggle; that taking risks can often lead to incredible rewards; that the people directly affected by a problem must have a hand in solving it. Most importantly, the struggle for social change isn't easy. While the battle lines between oppressed and oppressor seem clear-cut, the path to a just home, neighbourhood, or society is full of questions without easy answers.

Looking back at the anti-WTO mobilization, what I now find most inspiring aren't the street fights between the Black Bloc and riot police, but the spokescouncil of affinity groups, strangers to each other, which planned to shut down the city non-violently, and built the trust and commitment to actually accomplish the task. As Tobocman notes in his new afterword, "certain things can be seen clearly today that were hidden ... at the time."

At times, Tobocman echoes other war stories: the thrill of battle versus an inhuman enemy, the (alleged) redemptive power of violence. *War in the Neighborhood* is strongest when it illuminates the trauma caused by the asymmetrical war between developers, politicians, and the poor – when he looks clearly at the damaged among our fighters and the damage we do to each other. ★



YUTAKA DIRKS is a tenant rights organizer, journalist and writer whose work can be found in *Alberta Views*, *THIS*, *rabble.ca*, *Ricepaper Magazine*, the *Journal of Law and Social Policy*, and elsewhere.



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## SUSTAINER PROFILE #43

### HALEY GORDON



Haley was raised in southeastern Saskatchewan on a small mixed cattle and grain farm. She grew up surrounded by progressive politics because her family was involved with the National Farmers Union and the NDP, and there were always issues of *Briarpatch* and *The Ram's Horn* lying around that began to pique her interest in social justice issues. Currently, Haley is in her second year of the nursing program in Regina. In her spare time, she enjoys catching up on *Briarpatch* issues, walking her dog, listening to podcasts, and cooking.

#### What sparked your interest in pursuing nursing?

I was working as a settlement worker for the Moose Jaw Multicultural Council where I supported refugees and immigrant newcomers with housing, employment, education, and health care. I noticed that many people arrive with chronic conditions that haven't been diagnosed or they have been neglected, and I saw how the social determinants of health were impacting their lives, making it difficult to even manage a chronic condition. I wanted to be more involved in helping them find ways to manage their chronic conditions, and nursing was a good fit.

#### Can you recommend a podcast that *Briarpatch* readers might like?

I have a few favourites; one I recently discovered is *Heavyweight* by Jonathan Goldstein. I loved his show *Wiretap* on CBC and this is very similar to that as it explores his past and includes some of the same quirky characters. Some other favourites include: *Radiolab*, *Reveal*, and *Radio Ambulante*.

#### Why do you support *Briarpatch*?

We need alternative ideas and voices to be heard, especially in Saskatchewan. We need people to challenge the status quo and show that there are different ways to structure our society that would be equitable for all and we could all have a better quality of life.



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# Not in my backyard, or anyone else's

“ Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary.”

So concludes the sixth chapter of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The main character, Offred, is recalling the haunting advice of Aunt Lydia, who works for the government of Gilead. A totalitarian and repressive regime, Gilead strictly controls the lives of women like Offred. Before this regime took power, Offred was able to speak, move, and organize freely. Now, she is a handmaid – a class of women kept and used by the state solely for reproductive purposes.

Offred's memory is a good reminder of what can happen under a repressive regime, real or fictitious: if the people begin to accept the new laws or practices – or if they stop paying attention to changes – anything can become normalized.

*The Handmaid's Tale* is finding current cultural relevance as video streaming service Hulu prepares to launch its TV adaptation on April 26, 2017. Though the book hasn't gone out of print since its publication in 1985, the new series is making a particular impact against the backdrop of President Trump's draconian agenda on reproductive rights.

At the beginning of his first week as president, Trump signed an executive order banning federal funds from going to international aid organizations that perform abortions. He supports a ban on abortions in the U.S., and he has vowed to repeal the Affordable Care Act, defund Planned Parenthood, and appoint anti-abortion judges to the Supreme Court with hopes of overturning *Roe v. Wade*. By all accounts, the fight is on for Americans to defend their rights to comprehensive and accessible reproductive health care.

Many might think that in Canada, by comparison, we're doing much better. It's true that the Supreme Court of Canada's 1988 *R. v. Morgentaler* decision determined that abortion, like any other medically necessary procedure, should be publicly paid for and equally available to all who need it. In practice, though, this isn't the case.

Problems of access have been well-documented. For example, the Atlantic provinces have few abortion providers (with no providers at all in P.E.I.), and the territories have no providers offering abortions after 14 weeks. Cost and availability vary across the country. As Sara Tatelman previously documented in *Briarpatch*, issues of cost and access become especially problematic for young patients and those in rural or remote communities. Doctors can still opt out of prescribing contraceptives, performing

abortions, or referring a patient to a doctor who will – and if a patient lives somewhere with only one doctor (or one that visits infrequently), the implications are particularly frightening.

A positive development is Health Canada's recent rollout of Mifegymiso, a two-drug abortion medication. Approved in July 2015, the drug has been available only since January 2017. This drug combination is already used in 60 countries, is on the World Health Organization's list of essential drugs, and is an effective and safe abortion option.

But a new medication won't solve all our problems. Patients still require a prescription from a doctor, and must take one of the two drugs while in the presence of the prescriber. Cost is still a barrier as well: currently, only British Columbia and Ontario have billing codes for medical abortion (though other jurisdictions are working on developing billing codes), and without coverage, the procedure could cost up to \$300. Moreover, Mifegymiso is only available so far at a few clinics in the urban centres of Vancouver and Calgary. Though availability will increase in the coming months, all of these gaps still mean that patients in remote locations or with an anti-choice doctor may be prevented from accessing this treatment.

Legal abortion is not something we should take for granted. In the current federal Conservative Party leadership race, three candidates – Brad Trost, Pierre Lemieux, and Chris Alexander – have made statements in favour of restricting sex-selective abortions. We must be vigilant about defending and expanding our rights in this context of changing norms and renewed political interest in making restricted reproductive freedoms “ordinary.”

Many across the world have recently been showing solidarity for Americans who face very real threats to their reproductive rights. An estimated 110,000 Canadians marched across the country in women's marches on January 21, 2017. But while we need to keep supporting reproductive rights everywhere, we can't ease up on the misogynistic themes in political discourse in our own backyard. We need equitable access to reproductive options, reliable health-care practitioners, and affordable and accessible services across the country. *The Handmaid's Tale* may be a fictional dystopia, but our real world is inching toward restricted reproductive rights. We can't stop paying attention. ★



HALENA SEIFERTLING is from Regina and recently completed a masters of public policy in Vancouver. She has been active in human rights, electoral reform, climate justice, and Palestinian solidarity organizing.



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